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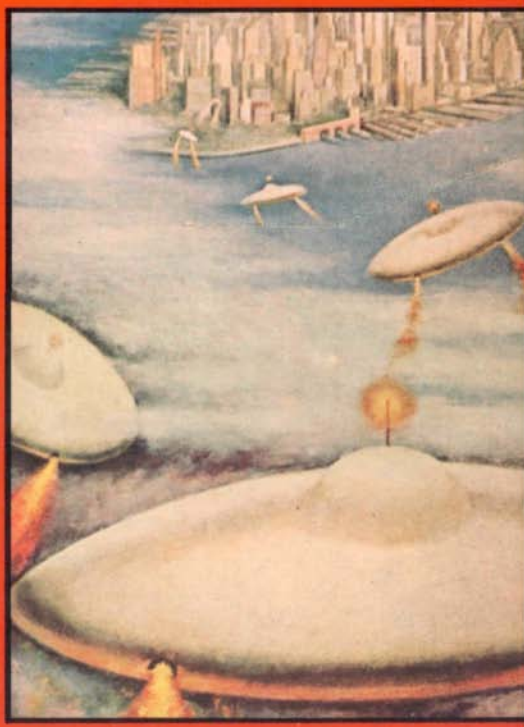

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4 DOOMSDAY ARMY
by Jack Sharkey

20 DEADLY MOON
by Fritz Leiber

48 RED MOON RISING
by Robert Bloch

62 THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY
by Rosel George Brown

68 THE SUMMER VISITORS
by Gordon R. Dickson

82 THE FORGETFUL CELIBATE
by E. K. Jarvis

90 WHEN HE AWAKENS
by Steven S. Gray



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# DOOMSDAY ARMY

By JACK SHARKEY

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

*It was a lucky thing for earth that Capt. Harry Coyne, the man who could fix squeaky doors and fluttery cookbooks, was on tap when the alien fleet arrived.*

MARSHA Coyne stirred listlessly at the mixture of carrots, potatoes and meat that she hoped would somehow turn itself into lamb stew if she only stirred long enough. The cookbook pages, propped open with the salt and pepper shakers, kept slithering from beneath their negligible weight and closing, hiding the recipe from her eyes.

"Harry!" she hollered through the open doorway into the living room, where her husband, in shirtsleeves and one-day growth of whiskers, sat hypnotized by the Saturday afternoon football game. "Wouldja c'mere a minute?"

"Yeah, yeah," he called, not moving his eyes a fraction from their magnetized focus. "Coming." Without unlocking his gaze, Harry arose slowly from the chair, and backed out toward the kitchen, his arms making small pistoning motions as he shared an end run with the ball carrier on the screen. "Damn. Offside," Harry breathed disgustedly. He turned at last to face his wife. "Yeah, Mar, what's up?"

His wife, not ceasing her monotonous stirrings within the aluminum pot, nodded toward the recalcitrant cookbook. "It keeps closing, Harry, and I don't know what to add next. Hold it for me, will you?"

Harry reached for the book, then spun about too late as a wild cheer rang out from the set in the room behind him. "Damn. Fumble and recovery!" he muttered. "And I missed it. Here—" he said,



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opening the book. "Where's it at?"

"Next page."

He flipped to the indicated page, scanned the sheet to find the recipe, and on doing so, simply tore the page out of the book and laid it flat on the table beside the stove, while Marsha fought an impulse to groan. "There y'are."

He started back for his game, whistling.

"Harry—*I* could have done *that*!" Marsha complained "You've ruined the cookbook!"

"Fix it later. Scotch tape." He left the room.

Marsha sighed and went on stirring. After eight years of marriage to Harry, she might have known what to expect. He never failed to take the simplest method of solving any given problem, even if the solution presented problems of its own. She looked toward his back as he settled himself once more in the armchair before the TV, and had to smile.

In a way, it made sense. The book kept closing over the page — therefore — take the page away from the book. She thought back ruefully to some of Harry's more outstanding brainstorms, applying instant remedies with no foresight whatsoever. Like the time she'd mentioned the annoying creak in the kitchen door, and Harry had, while she was out at the store, simply taken it off the hinges and stored it in the cellar, leaving their kitchen open to every stray cat, dog or vagabond in the neighborhood. True, it had solved the immediate problem of the squeak, but—

Marsha sighed and kept stirring the stew. "I've just got to remember not to ask for help, that's all," she said half-aloud. "I'm better off with my problems than with aid from Harry."

It was the last quarter of the game, while Marsha was setting the table for supper, when the "Special CBS News Bulletin" sign superceded the gridiron on the TV. Marsha paused with the sugar bowl in both hands, watching the screen over Harry's shoulder. She hated special bulletins. Whenever one of those signs flashed on, she always expected to hear that the Russians were on their way with The Bomb. She held her breath, awaiting the newscaster's voice.

After a moment, it came.

"Special CBS News Bulletin, from CBS Studios in New York . . . " said a well-modulated baritone voice. It



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sounded like Walter Cronkite to Marsha. She hoped it was he. Marsha trusted Walter Cronkite. "Civil Defense has reported the sighting of a fleet of Unidentified Flying Objects moving due west across the Atlantic Ocean. First sighted from Montauk Point, at the eastern tip of Long Island, the fleet is expected, at present speeds, to be over the New York area within an hour. Stay tuned to this channel for further details." The gridiron reappeared, and the football game continued as though nothing had happened.

"Harry—" Marsha said, hesitantly. "Do you think—?"

"Can't be serious, honey," Harry said, unguing his eyes from the screen for a moment. "If it were, I'd be getting a call from my National Guard unit to report in for emergency duty."

"Oh," said Marsha.

The telephone jangled harshly.

"Oh no!" said Marsha.

Harry, fairly resplendent in his new Army green uniform, with its gleaming captain's bars, deployed his men efficiently in a semicircle from the water on the east to the water on the west, neatly circumscribing Battery Park, at the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island. The men clutched their M-14's with perspiring hands, their eyes darting here and there in the bright blue, but cloud-cluttered, sky over the bay.

"Captain Coyne, sir," said Master Sergeant Ames, not looking at his officer, but watching the air over the water, "what makes the big brass think they'll land here? Or land at all?"

"Somebody reported their angle of descent," Harry said. "If it continues, they'll either have to land, or crash into the backside of Wall Street. Or, of course, pull up and go on," he added, after a moment's consideration.

"Think they're gonna be dangerous," Ames asked, his ice-blue eyes blinking nervously, "maybe with atomic weapons?"

"Maybe," said Harry. "Maybe not." It wasn't a good answer, but it was his duty as an officer to inspire confidence. He daren't seem the least bit unsure. However, he made his declaration of a fifty-fifty chance sound like a hard, super-accurate evaluation of conditions, and Sergeant Ames looked definitely relieved.

"Thank you, sir," he said, returning to his sky-scanning.



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"There they come!" someone screamed, jerking a waving arm toward the sky. A man along the line yelped, dropped his rifle, and turned to run. Harry was there immediately.

"All right, soldier, give me ten!" he ordered.

"N-now, sir?" the man, a young private, squeaked.

"Now!" Harry's voice was adamant.

The man hesitated, then dropped prone on the grass and did eight of the required pushups before collapsing on his face, pooped.

"Now get back in that line, and pick up your weapon!"

"Yes, sir," the man sulked, going and doing so.

By the time Harry returned his eyes to the sky, the fleet was greatly in evidence. Harry squinted against the sunlight, trying to count the ships. "Boy!" he said, hardly realizing he'd spoken loud. "There're at least twenty of them. And the *size* of them!" He gave a long, low whistle, indicating just how big.

"Shall I have the men open fire, sir?" Ames queried.

"Don't be silly," Harry barked, irritably. "They're still a half-mile out. "Wait'll they land, for pete's sake!"

"They won't *fit*, sir!" Ames said, frightened. "There are too many of them. Just *one* would crowd the park."

"We shall see," said Harry, feeling that this was about as true a statement as he'd yet made. "Have the men hold their fire until I give orders to the contrary."

"Yes, sir," Ames said smartly, and trotted off to relay the order, leaving Harry to observe the airborne newcomers.

He watched, fascinated despite himself, as the fleet came gliding in over the waters of the bay, their shadows pacing them over the white-capped waves below. Even as he looked, the great flat saucers began to slow down, more and more, until they were fairly *creeping* through the air toward Battery Park. "Incredible!" Harry murmurred. "What's holding them *up* at that ridiculous air-speed?"

He studied the nearest ship closely as it came down. It was inching forward, now, at about one mile an hour, a low buzzing sound coming from somewhere inside it. The buzzing grew stronger as it got nearer the ground, until Harry felt as vibratory as if he were upon one of those foot-easing machines at Coney Island. Then the buzzing slid down the sonic scale and



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stopped, as the great saucer, with a sullen "whump!" came to a flat stop on the gravel and grass of Battery Park.

Harry looked at it in wonder. At dead center, it had a sort of bulge, or blip, rising above the streamlined slope of the saucer like an afterthought-type metal igloo. A tall antenna, rising from the center of this igloo, suddenly began to glow, with a fine pink light that hurt his eyes. Abruptly, from the underside of the second ship, already overshadowing the first, there came a similar pink glow. Then pink lightning lanced from glow to glow, and locked. And, as Harry stood stupefied, this lightning drew the two ships together, until the second ship made a metallic "whump!" of its own, leaving the two nested together like the two halves of a yo-yo. And then the process was repeated with the next ship, and the next, and next, until all had landed.

"I'll be damned," Harry mumbled. "Like a stack of flapjacks!"

Sergeant Ames came loping back from the men. "Shall we open fire, sir?" he asked, respectfully.

"Better wait, and see if they're hostile," Harry said.

"But sir," Ames quavered. "If they *are* hostile, we may not get *time* to fire!"

"Well," Harry said philosophically, "it'll save ammunition."

Together, the two men stared at the new structure that loomed skyward in the park. There were twenty-five ships in all, the composite tower rearing about twenty stories high. As the last buzzing died away into the already twilit air, Harry turned to Ames.

"Better have the men rig up a battery of searchlights to keep this area bright. We don't want anybody sneaking out of those things after dark."

"Good idea, sir," said Ames, hurrying off.

When he returned, Harry was as he had left him, tall, upright, staring fixedly at the strange new "building" in the park. It was a moment before Ames spoke.

"Sir," he faltered, "what are you thinking about?"

Harry sighed, a sigh that came from deep within his rugged frame. "Lamb stew," he said.

"I've been so worried," Marsha said, as Harry drew his chair wearily up to the table. "What happened?"

"Nothing," Harry grunted,



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as she ladled the re-heated stew onto his plate. "That's the annoying thing: Nothing happened at all. They buzzed in, stacked up, cut their engines, and then just sat. No one came out. No more noise. No more motion. Nothing. It's—It's eerie."

"It's the Russians," Marsha said positively, seating herself opposite him, and helping herself from the bowl of stew. "I knew this would happen."

"Radio Moscow denies everything," Harry pointed out.

"They always do," Marsha pouted. "Who believes them?"

Harry twitched his shoulders, irritably. "So what if it *is* them? We're no better off than we would be with aliens."

Marsha shivered. "I wish you wouldn't use that word."

"Think of a better one, and I'll use that," Harry said, starting on his stew.

Marsha, hurt, fell silent. However, this had no effect on her husband, who was too hungry to notice, so she swallowed her pride, and spoke again. "How long till you go back?"

"Morning. About nine. Carson's keeping the watch for me, so I can get some sleep. What time is it, anyway?"

"Just past twelve," she said, after a glance at the kitchen clock above the stove. Then, "Do—" She found it hard to speak. "Do you think . . . they mean us harm?"

"If they sit there long enough, we'll probably start cutting our way inside to find out," he said, wiping up the last of the gravy from his plate with a wad of bread. "We can't just *leave* the damned thing there!"

"Why not?" said Marsha, rather snappishly.

"Because—" Harry began, then thought hard. Finally, he grunted, "Just because!"

"Maybe they're friendly," Marsha hazarded.

"Possibly," Harry said, drinking down his milk. He was too sleepy to risk a cup of coffee. "Then again, they may be just loading their ray pistols."

"Harry!" Marsha said.

"Sorry," he said, truly apologetic. "Sleepy. 'Night, honey." He got up from the table, kissed her cheek lightly, and went out of the room. Marsha sat there, suddenly very tired. She looked at the kitchen door—which still creaked—then at the ragged-edged cookbook page on the sink.

"I hope they don't leave any



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decisions up to Harry," she sighed. Tired though she was, she knew she wouldn't get to sleep. Almost grateful for the excuse, Marsha poured herself a steaming cup of coffee.

Harry, after an hour's fitful tossing amongst rumpled sheets, gave up and got into uniform again. He came out of the bedroom and peered into the kitchen. Marsha, her head pillowed on her arms, lay asleep at the edge of the table, a half-filled cup of cold black coffee before her. Harry hesitated, then got a throw-cushion from the living room sofa, and lifted her head enough to place this beneath it. Then he kissed her gently on the lips, careful not to awaken her, and left the apartment.

"Captain Coyne!" said lieutenant Paul Carson with some surprise, as Harry strode into the emergency Headquarters quonset set up at the edge of the park. "You're not due till morning."

"Couldn't sleep," Harry explained briefly. "Any change?"

"Nope." Paul shook his head and yawned. "The most trouble I've had is from a steady stream of brass. Damn! Even a general, from Governor's Island. I was almost hoping some alien *would* take a potshot while they were strolling around the base of that thing!"

"That's treason," Harry said without rancor, lighting a cigarette and sitting back in a canvas folding chair. "They all give up?" Paul nodded. "What'd the Pentagon say?"

"They're sending up 'experts', by jet," Paul snorted.

"Didn't know we *had* any experts on aliens," Harry laughed.

"We have now, apparently," Paul said, shaking his head. "Undoubtedly by special act of Congress!"

"How're the men taking it?"

"Usual reactions. The monotony of the vigil's beginning to get through to them. I already broke up one crap game."

"Good," Harry said. "May's well let them relax a bit till something breaks. They'll be better if they don't wait in a state of constant tension." He dropped his cigarette and ground it out under his heel. "My wife thinks it's the reds."

"Can't be," Paul said, wryly. "If it were, they'd be bragging about it by now."

"That's true," Harry said. "When're these 'experts' due?"



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"Any time at all. Scientists, anthropologists, and lots of brass. It's the brass I dread. They always want to know why such-and-such hasn't been done."

"Why *hasn't* such-and-such been done?"

"Probably because such-and-such isn't important enough to bother with. You know the kind of idiotic thing, Captain. 'Why isn't that man's belt-buckle polished?', or 'Are those regulation searchlights?' "

"They're just covering feelings of inferiority," Harry said solemnly. "I read that in a book."

"I'd like to borrow it, sometime," said Paul.

Someone knocked on the quonset door.

"Here we go," Paul groaned, getting up. "Everybody say 'cheese' ."

Four hours later, with dawn just breaking redly out over the bay, the last scientist made his last note and came back to join the group at the quonset.

"I suppose," said General Bryant, his grey eyebrows knitted portentously, "the metal is not of terrestrial origin?"

The scientist, a Doctor Emery Freid, looked up impatiently. "Don't be an ass," he said. "There are only so many elements on the periodic scale, General. It's a strange alloy, but most certainly of known metals."

General Bryant reddened, but blustered on. "How'd you manage to get a sampling of it? I should think it'd resist all efforts to take a scraping."

"Where'd you learn your metallurgy, *Weird Tales*?" said Freid. "I have a diamond-tipped sampling tool. Diamonds are still the hardest substance known."

"If you're going to be *snotty* . . . !" said General Bryant, and walked stiffly away.

Freid gave a little shudder, like a man trying to shake off a coating of dust from his clothes. "He should stick to his job, and I'll stick to mine," he said, to no one in particular.

Harry cleared his throat and spoke up.

"What did you find out, sir?" he asked, feeling this was a safe enough query.

Freid spread his hands. "What's to learn? They're made of metal. Looks like copper, mostly, but there seems to be a strain of magnesium and tungsten present, also. I'd guess the alloy depended on copper for flexibility, magne-



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sium for lightness, and tungsten for heat-resistance—lots of friction entering the atmosphere."

"I thought that tungsten oxidized rather rapidly," Harry said. "Isn't that why they use it in a vacuum in bulbs?"

Freid's wide grey eyes looked at Harry with respect. "Yes, as a matter of fact. I haven't figured out yet why this particular alloy hasn't burnt up. But I will. How'd you learn that, anyhow?"

Harry flushed. "Junior High Physics."

"Don't be ashamed," said Freid. "We've all got to start somewhere. Anyhow, as for the rest— well— there seems to be no radioactivity present in the area, so that would pre-suppose a non-atomic power source . . . Or damned fine shielding."

"Anything else?" Harry asked.

" 'Fraid not. I rode a helicopter up to get a look at that top ship, hoping to find something from the antenna you mentioned in your report. Except that it has no antenna. None at all."

Harry blinked. "Damn. Then they must *always* land in this order. Now I come to think of it, the first ship in was flat on the bottom, with no hollow to receive one of those metal bulges or antenna. Creepy, huh?"

Freid nodded slowly. "My sentiments exactly."

"What do you think we should do, bust in?" Harry went on.

Freid shrugged. "That's not my department."

General Bryant, standing forlornly out of earshot, finally decided he couldn't bear being left out of things and came back to the group. "I guess," he boomed, startling those who hadn't seen his approach, "the next move is ours. No doubt about it."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, glad for the chance of some action. "What's our move?"

"Sit tight," said General Bryant, "and wait."

"Oh," said Harry, disappointed.

"I'll send my report to Washington at once," Bryant went on, adding, in the best counterspy tradition, "Coded, of course."

He strode off briskly, leaving a disheartened group behind him. Paul Carson gnashed his teeth impotently.

"The fate of our nation," he grated. "In those two clumsy paws—" He stopped as Harry shot him a warning frown. Private conversation was one thing; insubordinate talk was



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not proper in front of the doctor, a civilian.

Freid, as if unaware of Harry's demeanor, said to Paul, "I know you don't really mean that. General Bryant is just exposing more of his frightened uncertainty than you are. Could you do any better, in his place?"

Paul looked at Freid, then looked shamefacedly at the ground. "Guess not," he admitted.

"Daylight's almost full," Freid remarked, dropping the subject. "I think I'll catch some sleep, and come back later on. General Bryant knows where to reach me."

He'd just turned to go, when an apprehensive muttering, then an open shout, arose from the men encircling the piled-up space vessels. *"It's opening up!"*

Harry spun about, alert, his hand slipping to his holstered .45 with speed that would have made a western gunfighter turn pale. However, it was Harry who turned pale, along with everybody else in Battery Park.

For not one, but *all* the ships were opening, simultaneously, beginning with a vertical crack that split the composite structure from ground to apex, and slowly slid back until the erstwhile cylinder stood there like a twenty-story corrugated niche, exposing the alien.

Exposing the solitary alien, also twenty stories tall.

*"Yipe!"* said General Bryant. "That's impossible. It's—it's damned near incredible!"

"He must have come in *sections!"* Paul gasped.

"Hail, men of Earth!" said the alien, his voice echoing off the skyscrapers beyond the park. "I am the Doomsday Army."

"Ridiculous!" said General Bryant. "One man can't be an army!"

"Do not you earthmen have a term: one-man-army?"

Bryant sputtered, turned purple, then pink, then sputtered some more, unable to think of a comeback. Then everybody took a frantic backward leap as the shadow of the giant fell across them. He was squatting down, the better to see the group.

"So you're the earthmen," he marvelled. "Kind of puny, aren't you!" Even seated on his haunches, he was a good six stories taller than anyone present.

"What do you want, anyhow?" General Bryant said, with a slight return of officiousness. Harry felt a little guilty about the way he'd been



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talking. It took guts to be stern with a giant alien. Or tremendous imbecility.

"I want this planet," said the alien. "Peacefully, if possible. If not— Well, I'm prepared to fight."

"So are we!" General Bryant roared. "With every weapon we have. You can't just walk in here— That is— Fly in here and take things over."

"Why can't I?" asked the alien, reasonably enough.

Once again, the general was reduced to sputtering. An officer finally led him to the quonset, and made him lie down with a wet rag on his forehead.

Harry seemed to be left in charge. "Now, look here," he said, in a voice that trembled more than he enjoyed, "we don't like the idea of using atomics this near one of our major cities, but if it becomes necessary, we will."

"Atomics, *pah!*" said the alien, snapping his fingers with a noise like a sharp thundercrack. "I'm immune to molecular dissolution."

"He—he's bluffing—" said Paul, nervously.

"Even if he isn't," Harry muttered, "I'd hate to disintegrate half of Manhattan Island finding out we're wrong."

He returned his attention to the alien (from whom, by the way, his attention couldn't wander very far).

"Look, you, just what's your proposal? Some sort of coexistence?"

"Don't be silly," said the alien. "I can't spend the rest of my life avoiding stepping on people. I'll give you time, of course, but you must evacuate."

"The *planet?*" Harry cried. "The whole planet?"

"Certainly," said the alien. "You have a month."

"You're crazy!" Harry said angrily. "We couldn't get one hundredth of a percent of the population off in that time. *If* we intended to. Which we do not!" He felt kind of funny, making such official statements. After all, he was only a captain in the National Guard, hardly in a position to dictate planetary policy— On the other hand, he somehow could not help but feel that the federal attitude would be very similar to his own.

"I've made my declaration of intentions," the alien said, with an obviously feigned yawn of contempt. "You can do as I say, or not. It makes little difference to me. A month. Thirty days from now. Then I move in."

"You can't hope to live here



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alone . . ." Harry argued. "What would be the purpose? Big as you are, you scarcely *crowd* the planet. Couldn't you settle for some uninhabited outlying area? The Sahara, perhaps, or one of the poles—"

"I should have explained," said the alien. "There are others coming. They'll be here at month's end. We intend to colonize this planet."

"Tell me," said Harry, his curiosity getting the better of his irritation, "do you *all* travel in—uh—in parts?"

"Naturally," said the alien. "A single ship large enough to carry me in unity with myself would be difficult to get airborne. Segregation is the only way."

"Might have known he'd be in favor of *that*," Paul spat.

"You sure you couldn't live just as well on Mars or Venus?" Harry offered weakly. "Or Jupiter! There's a really *big* planet for you, now! Plenty of room, and—"

"Mars is too oxygen-poor, Venus too wet, Jupiter too oppressively gravitational *and* too tiny and torrid, Saturn too dim—"

"Never mind, never mind, I get the idea," Harry muttered.

Doctor Freid, hitherto silent, spoke up.

"How can anyone your size stand up in our gravity? By the laws of mass and volume, you should be too heavy to support your own weight."

The alien smiled. "By your standards, I'm practically hollow. I only weigh a few tons, really."

"Fascinating," said Doctor Freid.

"But now, I'm tired of squatting," said the alien, rising back up to his awesome—well, *more* awesome — full height. "I shall see you again, at the end of the month. Or, *not* see you again, ever, if you're smart, and heed my warning."

With that, he stepped back into the stacked-vessel "niche," and the opening curved back around him and sealed itself once more. Doctor Freid turned to Harry.

"What do you intend doing, Captain Coyne?" he said.

"What any American soldier would do," said Harry. "I'm going to pass the buck to the Pentagon."

"But what'd he *look* like?" Marsha urged. "The papers told his size, but that's about all, Harry . . ."

Harry, trying to doze on the sofa to catch up on his night's sleep which he'd missed, sighed and slid into a more-or-less upright position. "Like a man, honey, period. Hair kind of



(Continued on page 106

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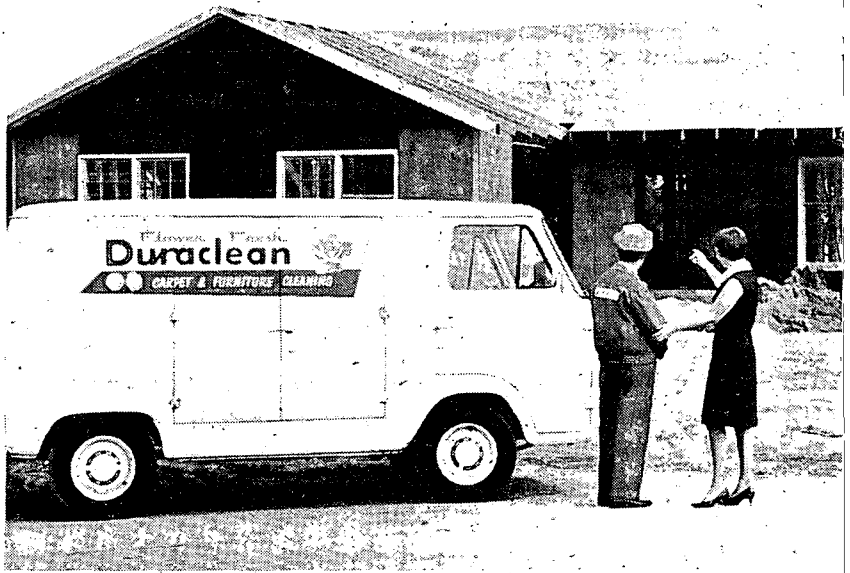
# Your Dreams *Can* with your own

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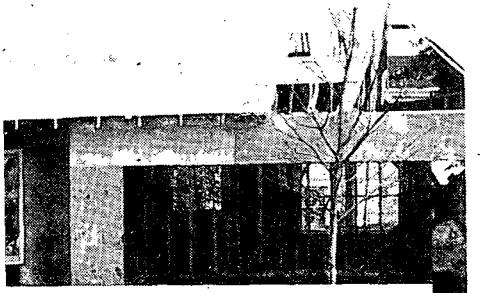

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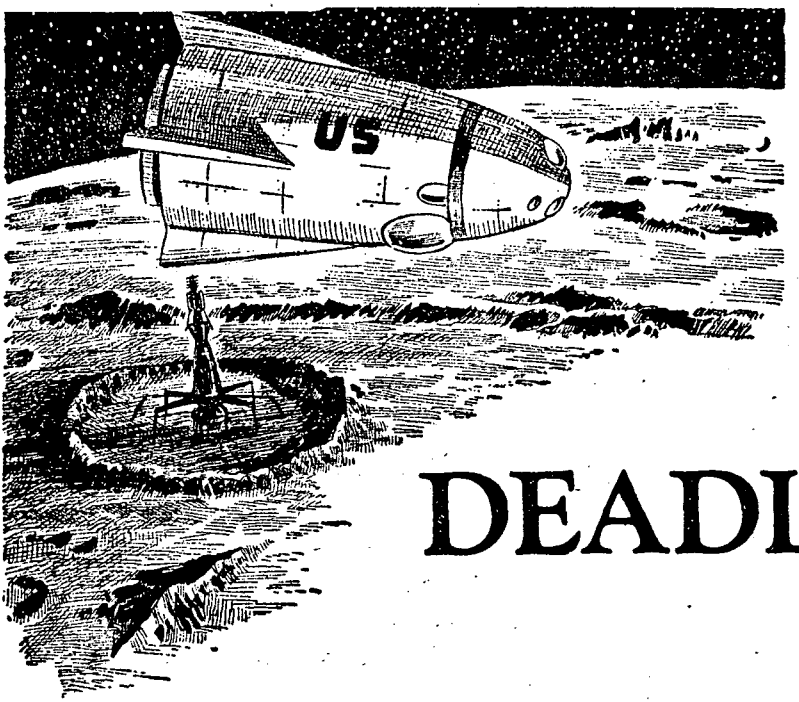


ILLUSTRATOR
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# DEADLY

ALMOST a quarter of a million miles above the earth, the moon rode east in her orbit around the larger sphere at the cosmically gentle speed of two-thirds of a mile a second, though to those on the eastward spinning planet below, completing 27 turns for the moon's one, she seemed to move west each night with the stars.

A globe of almost airless, sun-blanched rock two thousand miles wide, Luna hung now beside the earth but moving out beyond her, away from the sun. The only face of her that earthlings ever saw was now half in the full glare of raw sunlight, half in darkness. It was the night of the half moon, or first quarter as it is commonly called.

But on this night of the half moon, Luna at last had two



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*The girl had nightmares when the moon was above the horizon. But Dr. Snowden was not sure something infinitely more evil than a nightmare was at work in the girl's mind.*

# MOON

By FRITZ LEIBER

moons of her own, though they were as invisible to earthside viewers as the two tiny moons of Mars. Free-falling around her at almost a mile a second in tight orbits a few score miles above her cratered surface with its "seas" (*mares*) of darker rock, were two small manned ships, one of the American Space Force, one of the Russian Space Force. Making a swift circuit of the moon every two hours, the pilots of these ships were each rushing through independent surveys of the moon's treacherous pumice-powdered surface, in preparation for actual landings of larger exploration ships in the near future.

So more people than ordinarily were looking up at the moon from earth's evening side. But most of them were looking up



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rather more in fear than wonder. The past decade had been one of increasingly angry bickering between the leaders of the two great nations. The long-dreaded Third World War seemed very close and the neck-and-neck race to establish the first military base on the moon seemed only one more move bringing it closer.

Nor had the war-heavy atmosphere been improved by the recent suggestion, made almost simultaneously by a Russian scientist and an American military expert, that the moon would be an ideal spot for the testing—particularly in deep underground bursts—of atomic bombs, a research activity theoretically banned on earth itself.

At the moment the Pacific Coast of America was moving into earth's shadow under the half moon. The towering evergreen forest on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains was dipping and darkening into night.

On a lonely hilltop that lifted out of the forest toward the center of the state of Washington, not far east of Puget Sound, two men and a girl were tensely watching the moon "rise"—Luna was already quite high in the southern sky—over the peaked roof of a white-walled Cape Cod style home.

The younger man could hardly have been more than a few years older than the girl—in his mid-twenties at most—yet he gave the impression of a matured thoughtfulness and poise. He was dressed for the city with the conservative elegance of a successful professional man.

The older man looked about fifty, though his mustache and eyebrows were still dark and his whole face strongly virile with its deep asymmetric vertical furrows between the brows. His rough sports clothes suited him.

He had an arm clasped around the shoulders of the girl, who likewise was dressed for the country. Her face was beautiful, but now although the evening was chilly, it was beaded with perspiration and it showed the taut, barely controlled terror of a woman who forces herself to watch an excruciating or deadly sight.

"Go on, Janet," the older man prompted harshly. "What does the moon make you think of?"

"A spider," the girl answered instantly. "A bloated white spider hanging just over my head in an invisible web. You see, I have a horror of spiders too, doctor." The last remark she shot as an explanation to the younger man. "Or a revolver! Yes, that's it!—a nickle-plated revolver with mother-of-pearl grips pointed at my chest—pointed at all of us!—by a drooling, giggling old mad-



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woman whose face is white with powder and whose cheeks have circles of violet rouge and whose yellowed lace dress—"

"I think that's enough demonstration, Professor McNellis," the younger man interrupted. "Now if we could go inside with your daughter—"

"No! I first want to prove to you, Dr. Snowden, that it's only the nightmares that are any real trouble to Janet, that this moon-fear hasn't in any way seriously cracked her waking nerves."

"No, and we don't want it to, either," the younger man retorted quietly.

"Go on, Janet," the older man repeated, ignoring the implied criticism. "What else do you see in the moon?"

"A man, a rabbit, a clown, a witch, a bat, a beautiful lady," the girl answered in rapid sing-song. She seemed to have lost some of her terror, or at least some of her submissiveness, during the interchange between the two men. She chuckled uneasily and said, "Dad, anyone would think *you* were the psychiatrist, the way you're using the moon for a Rorschach test!" Then her voice went grave with insight. "The moon *is* the original Rorschach inkblot, you know. The *mares* are the faded ink. For thousands of years it's been hanging up there identically the same and people have been seeing things in it. It's the only solid thing you can look at in the heavens that has any shape or parts."

The older man's arm dropped away from the girl a little. "That's quite true," he said in an odd voice. "Yet I never thought of it just that way. In a lifetime of astronomical work I never had just that thought."

The younger man moved in, put his own arm around the girl's shoulders and turned her away from the moon. The older man started to oppose him, then gave way.

"And now, Miss McNellis, since you've made an original contribution to the science of astronomy," the younger man said lightly, "I think that will be enough lunar observation for tonight."

"You're the doctor," the girl told him, managing a little smile. "The Moon Doctor."

"That title's a gross exaggeration, Janet, hung on me by one silly newspaper story," he assured her, smiling back. "Actually I wouldn't go near the place. I'm afraid of space."

"Just the same, Dad got you because you're the Moon Doctor."

"He knows a million times more about the moon than I do. And I'm sure he also knows that it's perfectly normal for a girl whose boyfriend is orbiting



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around the moon to feel frightened on his account and to view the place he's exploring—or surveying—as an almost supernatural enemy."

"Janet's fear of the moon goes back a lot further than her engagement to Tom Kimbro," the older man put in argumentively.

"Yes, Dad, but I *am* frightened on Tom's account."

"You shouldn't be. Dr. Snowden, I've pointed out to Janet that she's no worse off than a girl engaged to one of the early polar explorers. Better, because polar explorers were away for years."

"Yes, Dad, but their girlfriend couldn't go out in the yard and see Antarctica or the northern icecap hanging in the sky and know that *he* was up there, invisible, but moving across it." The edge-of-hysteria note had returned to her voice and she started slowly to turn around. "I think the moon looks as if it were made of ice," she said with eerie faintness. "Dirty ice with lots of bubbles in it."

"Janet, that's a crackpot theory!" her father said angrily. "How you could even start looking at those *Welt-Eis-Lehre* pamphlets when your father's a legitimate astronomer—"

"It's getting cold out here. We can continue inside," Dr. Andreas Snowden said firmly. This time Professor McNellis did not protest.

The living room was quite livable in spite of the way it was crammed with books and glass-fronted shelves of small meteorites and other items of astronomical interest. After they had settled themselves and Prof. McNellis had poured coffee at Dr. Snowden's suggestion, the latter fixed the professor's daughter with a friendly grin for a few moments and then said, "And now I want to hear all about it, Janet. Ordinarily I'd talk to you alone, and tomorrow I will, but this way seems comfortable now. Let's see, your mother died when you were a little girl and so you've spent your life with your father, who is a great student of the moon, although his specialty is meteoritics—and just recently you've become engaged to Lieutenant Commander Tom Kimbro, pilot and crew of America's first circumlunar survey ship and infinitely more the Moon Man than I'm the Moon Doctor."

"I've known Tom for years, though," the girl added, smilingly at ease herself now that there was a roof overhead. "Dad's always been mixed up in the Moon Project."

"Yes. Now tell me about this moon-horror of yours. And please, Prof. McNellis, no professional interruptions no matter what comes up, even Cosmic Ice Theory."

He said it jokingly, but it



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sounded like a command just the same. The professor, less tense now that he was playing host, took it with good grace.

His daughter glanced gratefully at the young doctor, then grew thoughtful. "The nightmares are the worst part," she said after a bit. "Especially after they got so bad two months ago. I'm afraid of going crazy while I'm having them. In fact, I think I do go crazy and stay that way for ten minutes or so after I wake up. That was what happened two months ago when I reared out of bed and got Dad's revolver and shot off all the bullets in it through the bedroom window straight at the moon. I knew at the time that it was some sort of gesture I was making—I knew I couldn't hit the moon, or at least I was pretty sure I couldn't—but at the same time I knew it was something I had to do to save my sanity. The only other thing I could have done would have been to dive in our bomb shelter and never come out. You know, it was like when something's broken your nerve and made you cower, and if you don't strike out right away, no matter how convulsively . . ."

"I understand," the doctor said soberly. There was approval in his voice. "Janet, what happens in these dreams?"

"Nightmares, you mean. Nightmare, really, for it's always about the same. It repeats." Janet closed her eyes. "Well, I'm standing outside and it's night and then the moon comes across the sky very fast, only it's much bigger and brighter. Sometimes it almost seems to brush the trees. And I squinch down as if it were a big silver express train come out of nowhere behind me and I'm terribly frightened. It plunges out of sight and I think I'm safe, but then it comes roaring up over the opposite horizon, even lower this time. There's a hot smell as if the air were being burnt by friction. This keeps on over and over again, faster and faster, though each time I think it's the last. I begin to feel like Poe's man in 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' tied flat on the floor and looking up at the gleaming pendulum that keeps coming closer each whistling stroke until the knife-edge is about to slice him in two.

"But finally I can't help myself, I get curious. I know it's positively the worst thing I can do, that there's some dreadful law against it, that I'm defying some fantastically powerful authority, but just the same I reach up—don't ask me how I manage when the moon's going so fast, I don't know, and don't ask me how I reach so far when it's still in the treetops—sometimes it seems to press its cratered face down into the yard



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and sometimes I grow an arm long as the magic beanstalk—but anyway I reach up, knowing I shouldn't, and I touch the moon!"

"How does the moon feel to your fingers when you touch it?" Dr. Snowden asked.

"Hairy, like a big spider," Janet answered rapidly. Then she opened her eyes wonderingly. "I never remembered *that* before. The moon is rock. Why did I say it, doctor?"

"I don't know. Forget it." Then, "What happens next?" he asked matter-of-factly.

Janet hugged her elbows and held her knees tight together. "The moon breaks up," she whispered. "It cracks all over like a white plate. For a moment the fragments churn around, then they all come hammering down at me. But in the instant before I'm destroyed and the world with me, while the fragments are still streaking down at me like bullets or an avalanche of rocks or a jack-in-the-box upside down, growing mountain-size in a moment—in that instant I feel this dreadful guilt and I know I'm responsible for it all because I touched the moon. That's when I go crazy." She let out a breath.

Dr. Snowden smiled. "You know, Janet, I can't help thinking how two or three thousand years ago your dream would have been regarded as a clear warning from the gods not to land on the moon—plus a prevision of the dreadful things that would happen to us if we kept on meddling sacrilegiously with the heavenly bodies. *No,* Prof. McNellis, I don't mean a word of that seriously," he added quickly as he noted that the astronomer's expression had become aggressively disapproving. "It's just that I make it a habit at a session like this of saying whatever comes into my head. I believe in bringing even superstitious thoughts out and looking at them. By the way, I'd say Janet's dream shows some elements of Cosmic Ice Theory, wouldn't you? See, I break my own rules as soon as I make them."

"If you dignify it with the name Theory," the professor replied sardonically. "A Viennese engineer named Hoerbiger started the whole *Welt-Eis-Lehre* business—a man with no astronomical training. His weird and wonderful notion was that the moon is made of ice and mud, that it came spiraling in from the infinite and will soon get so close to earth that it will cause floods and earthquakes and then break up, showering us with a fiery frigid hail. What's more according to Hoerbiger earth has had six previous moons, which all broke up the same way. This



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one we've got now is the seventh. Incidentally, the break-up of the sixth moon is supposed to have accounted for all legends of universal floods, fire-breathing dragons, falling towers of Babel, the Twilight of the Gods, and what have you.

"It's all nothing new, by the way. In the last century Ignatius Donnelly, who even got to be a member of Congress, wrote it all up in his book *Ragnarok*, except he used comets instead of moons —in those days they thought of comets as more massive. And now Velikovsky's done it again —gone over Hoerbiger once lightly, with comets. Took in some allegedly smart people, too.

"Hoerbiger developed *one* great set of followers at any rate —the Nazis. Most of them were suckers for pseudo-science. Cosmic Ice suited the Nordic superman perfectly.

"Of course, Janet knows all about this—she's read the junk, haven't you, dear?"

The doctor cocked his head and asked quickly, "Am I mistaken, Prof. McNellis, or isn't there nevertheless some shadow of a real scientific theory behind this notion of moons breaking up?"

"Oh yes. If a satellite with a plastic core gets close enough to its mother planet, the tidal action of the latter tears it apart. That's what's supposed to have produced the rings of Saturn—the break-up of a moon of Saturn that got too close. The crucial distance is called Roche's limit. In the case of earth it's only six thousand miles above the ground —Luna would have to be that close, even if she had the right kind of core, which she hasn't. It *has* been suggested—by George Gamow—that if everything worked out just right this situation might actually come about—in one hundred billion years!" The professor chuckled. "You can see that none of this stuff applies to our present situation at all."

"Still, it's interesting." The doctor looked back from father to daughter and asked casually, "Janet, do you believe in this *Welt-Eis-Lehre*?"

She shook her head while her father snorted. "But it's interesting," she added with a nervous, almost impish smile.

"I agree," Dr. Snowden said, nodding. "You know, Hans Schindler Bellamy, Hoerbiger's British disciple, had a very vivid childhood dream almost exactly like yours, that later helped convert him to Hoerbiger."

"Then you already knew what I was telling you about the Cosmic Ice farrago?" Prof. McNellis said accusingly.

"Only a bit here and there," the doctor assured him. "One or two of my patients were con-



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verts." He did not pursue the point. "Janet," he said, "I gather your own moon dreams go back to childhood, but they weren't so frightening then?"

"That's right. Except for one time when Dad took me on an ocean cruise just after mother died. I'd see the moonlight dancing on the water. The dreams were very bad then."

Prof. McNellis nodded. "We went to the Caribbean. You were just seven. Almost every night you'd wake up whimpering and blurry-eyed. Naturally, Dr. Snowden, I assumed Janet was reacting to her mother's death."

"Of course. Tell me, Janet, where is the real moon when you have these dreams? I mean, do they tend to cluster around the time of the full moon?"

The girl bobbed her head vigorously. "Once—just once—I remember having the nightmare in the daytime and when I woke up I saw the moon out of the window, faint silver in the pale blue afternoon sky."

Again Prof. McNellis nodded confirmation and said, "For years I've kept a record of Janet's dreams. In every instance the moon was above the horizon when the dream occurred. There were none during the dark of the moon—none of the hundred and seventeen Janet reported to me, at any rate."

The doctor frowned quizzically. "That's a rather astonishing circumstance, don't you think? To what do you attribute it?"

The professor shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe moonlight is the stimulus that triggers the dream, or was to start with."

"Yes," Janet said rather solemnly. "Doctor, isn't it an old theory that the moon causes mental upsets? You know, Luna and lunacy. And isn't there supposed to be something very special about moonlight?—something affecting growth and women's monthly cycles and the electrical pressures in the blood and the brain?"

"Don't get off on that track, Janet," her father said sharply. "Another real possibility, Dr. Snowden, is that Janet has a moon-clock in her brain and that her subconscious only sends the dream when the moon is topside. I'm just telling you the facts."

Janet raised her hand. "I just remembered," she said excitedly, "that the exact position of the moon in the sky had a lot to do with my Caribbean dreams being so bad. Dr. Snowden," she continued anxiously, "you know that up north here the moon is never exactly overhead, that even when it's at its highest in the sky it's still south of the zenith?"

"Yes, I know that much," he grinned.

"Well, when we sailed to the



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Caribbean I remember Dad explaining to me that now we were in the Tropic Zone the moon could be directly overhead. In fact, on one night of the cruise it *was* directly overhead." She shivered.

"I think I remember telling you about that," her father said, "but I don't recall it making any impression on you at the time. At least you didn't say anything to me."

"I know. I was afraid you'd be angry."

"But why? And why should the moon being in the zenith frighten you especially?"

"Yes, Janet, why?" Dr. Snowden echoed.

She looked back and forth between the two men. "Don't you see? If the moon were straight overhead, it could fall straight down on me. Anywhere else, it might miss me. It's the difference between being in the mouth of a tunnel that may collapse at any minute and being *in* the tunnel."

This time it was the professor who chuckled. "Janet," he said, "you certainly did take this thing seriously when you were a tyke."

"I still take it seriously," she flared at him. "My feelings take it seriously. What holds the moon up? A lot of scientific laws! What if the laws should be repealed, or broken?"

"Oh Janet," was all her father could say, still chuckling, while Dr. Snowden commented, "Your feelings take it seriously—that's a nice phrase, Janet. But your mind doesn't take it seriously, does it?"

"I guess not," she admitted unwillingly.

"For instance," he pressed, "I don't know if it's possible, but suppose there should be a volcanic eruption on the moon, you know that the chunks of rock thrown up would fall back to the moon, don't you? That they couldn't hit the earth? Even if they were shot out toward the earth?"

"I suppose you're right," she agreed after a moment.

"No you're not, Dr. Snowden —not exactly," Prof. McNellis interjected, getting up. He was grinning with friendly maliciousness. "You say you're a man who believes in speaking his thoughts and settling for nothing less than reality. Good! Those are my own sentiments." He stopped in front of one of the glass-fronted cases. "Come over here, I've got something to show you. You too, Janet—I never told you about these. After your nightmares started, I always believed in playing down the moon to you, until Dr. Snowden convinced me of the superior virtue of always speaking all the truth."

"I didn't exactly say—" Dr. Snowden began and cut himself



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short. He went over to the case. Janet McNellis stopped just behind him.

Prof. McNellis indicated some specimens of what looked like blackish glass neatly arranged on white cardboard. Most of them seemed to be fragments of small domed disks, but a few were almost perfect buttons a half inch to an inch across.

Prof. McNellis cleared his throat. "Meteorites of this sort are called tektites," he explained. "They are found only in the Tropic Zone or near it—in other words, under the moon. The theory is that when large meteorites hit the moon, some fragments of the moon's siliceous—glassy or sandy—surface are dashed upward at speeds greater than the moon's low escape velocity of a mile and a half a second. Some of these fragments are captured by earth's gravitational field. During their fall to earth they are melted by the heat of friction with the air and take their characteristic button shape. So right here, in all likelihood, you are looking at bits of actual moon-rock, tiny fragments of—*Janet, what is it?*"

Dr. Snowden looked around. Janet was leaning tautly forward, her gaze hypnotically fixed on the tektites. She was trembling visibly. ". . . like spiders," he heard her say faintly.

Suddenly her face convulsed into a mask halfway between panic and rage. She lifted her fists above her head and lunged at the glass. Dr. Snowden grabbed her around the waist, using his other arm to block her descending fists, and in spite of her struggles wrenched her around so that she wasn't looking at the case. She continued to struggle and he could feel her still shivering too.

The professor hesitated, then went out in the hall and called, "Mrs. Pulaski!"

The girl stopped struggling but the doctor didn't release her. "Janet," he whispered sharply, "what do *you* believe causes your dreams?"

"You'll think I'm crazy," she whispered back.

His arms hugged her a little more tightly. "Everyone's crazy," he assured her with great conviction.

"I think my dreams are warnings," she whispered. *"I think they're somehow broadcast to my mind from a station on the moon."*

"Thank you, Janet," the doctor said, releasing her.

Prof. McNellis returned with a stout motherly woman. Janet went to her. "'Scuse me, everybody, I was goofy," she said. "G'night, Dad, doctor."

When the two women were gone the two men looked at each



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other. The doctor lifted his empty coffee cup. As the professor poured for both of them, he said ruefully, "I guess I was the goofy one, shocking Janet that way."

"It's almost impossible to tell in advance how something like that will work out," the doctor consoled him. "Though I'll admit I was startled by those tektites myself. I'd never heard of the things."

The professor frowned. "There are a lot of things about the moon that most people don't know. But what do you think about Janet?"

"It's too soon to say. Except that she seems remarkably stable, both mentally and emotionally, for whatever it is she's going through."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"You mustn't worry about her cracking up, professor, but I also advise you not to put her in any more test situations."

"I won't!—I think I've learned my lesson." The professor's tone grew confidential. "Dr. Snowden, I've often wondered if some childhood trauma mayn't have been the cause of Janet's moon-dread. Perhaps she believed that my interest in astronomy—to a child, the moon—was somehow responsible for her mother's death."

"Could be," the doctor nodded thoughtfully. "But I have a hunch that the real cause of Janet's dreams has nothing to do with psychoanalysis or *Welt-Eis Lehre* or her anxiety about Tom Kimbro."

The professor looked up. "What else then?" he asked sharply.

The doctor shrugged. "Again it's too early to say."

The professor studied him. "Tell me," he said, "why are you called the Moon Doctor? The Moon Project recommended you—I didn't investigate any further."

"I had luck treating a couple of Project executives who had nervous breakdowns—but that isn't the main reason." The doctor held out his cup for more coffee. After taking a swallow, he settled back. "About two years ago," he began, "I had a run of private patients who had a horror of the moon mixed up with their other troubles. It seemed too much of a coincidence, so I sent out feelers and inquiries to other psychiatrists, lay analysts, mental hospitals, psycho wards, and so on. The answers came in fast!—evidently there were dozens of doctors as puzzled as I. It turned out that there were literally thousands of cases of mental aberration characterized by moon-dread, hundreds of them involving dreams very similar to



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Janet's about the moon breaking up—exploding, suffering giant volcanic eruptions, colliding with a comet or with earth itself, cracking under tidal strain, and so on."

The professor shook his head wonderingly. "I knew Project Moon had touched off a bit of a panic reaction, but I never dreamed it went that deep."

The doctor said, "In hundreds of cases—again like Janet's—there was a history of mild moon-fears going back to childhood."

"Hmm—sounds like the onset of the mass neurosis, or whatever you'd call it, coincided with the beginnings of high rocketry and space travel."

"Apparently. But then how do you explain this? For about four thousand dreams of moon breakup I got dates—day, hour, approximate minute. In ninety seven percent of those instances the moon was above the horizon when the dream occurred. I've become convinced that some straight-line influence traveling from the moon to the dreamer is at work—something that, like short radio waves, can be blocked off by the curve and mass of the earth."

"Moonlight?" the professor suggested quickly.

"No. These dreams occur just as often when the local sky is heavily clouded as when it's clear. I don't think light or any other part of the electromagnetic spectrum is responsible. I think it's an entirely different order of waves."

The professor frowned. "Surely you're not suggesting something like thought-waves? You know, doctor, even if there is such a thing as telepathy or extrasensory perception, the chances are it takes place instantaneously, altogether outside the world of space and time. The notion of thought-waves similar to those of light and sound is primitive."

"I don't know," the doctor said. "Galileo thought that *light* moved instantaneously too, but it turned out that it was just too fast for him to measure. The same might be true of thought-waves—that they go so much faster than light that they *seem* to move instantaneously. But only seem—another century may refine techniques for measuring their speed."

"But Einstein—" The professor shrugged. "In any case the notion of telepathy is completely hypothetical."

"I don't know," the doctor repeated. "While you were calling the nurse, Janet quieted and I took the opportunity to ask her what she thought was causing her dreams. She said, *'I think my dreams are broadcast to my mind from a station on the moon.'*



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Prof. McNellis, that is by no means the first time a patient with moon-horror has made that suggestion to me."

The professor bowed his head, massaging his brow as if it were beginning to ache. "I guess I don't know either," he muttered.

The doctor's eyes brightened. "But perhaps you do," he said softly. He leaned forward. "Prof. McNellis," he continued, "what is it that's really happening on the moon? What is it that you Project people have been observing on the moon's surface that you won't reveal to outsiders, not even to me? What is it that Tom Kimbro may be glimpsing now?"

The professor didn't look up, but his hand stopped massaging his forehead.

"Prof. McNellis, I *know* you've been observing something strange on the moon. I got unmistakable hints of it from one of my Project patients, but even in his condition he let himself be gagged by security regulations. What is it? You don't suppose I came way out here *only* to treat Janet, do you?"

For several seconds neither man moved or spoke. It was a contest of wills. Then the professor looked up shiftily.

"For centuries some astronomers, usually the less dependable ones, have been observing all sorts of 'strange' things on the moon," he began evasively. "One hundred and fifty years ago Gruithuisen reported seeing a fortress near the crater Schroeter. One hundred years ago Zentmayer saw mountain-size objects marching or moving across the moon during an eclipse. Bright spots have been seen, black spots, spots like giant bats —Charles Fort's books of newspaper-science are crammed with examples! Really, Dr. Snowden, strange things seen on the moon are an old, many-times-exploded story." His voice had grown loud and assertive, but he did not meet the doctor's eyes.

"Prof. McNellis, I'm not interested in past observations of strange appearances on the moon," the doctor pressed on insistently. "What I want to know is what's being observed on the moon right now. It's my guess that it has nothing to do with Russian activities—I've heard through European colleagues that there's been a sizable outbreak of some kind of moon-psychosis, plus moon-dreams, in the Soviet Union too—so you don't have *that* reason for making security regulations sacrosanct. Please tell me, Prof. McNellis—I need the information if I'm to treat Janet successfully."

The professor twisted in his chair, finally said miserably, "It's been made top secret.



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They're mortally afraid of setting off a major panic, or having the whole Project canceled."

"Prof. McNellis, a panic *is* being set off and maybe the Project *should* be canceled, but that's nothing to me. My interest is solely professional—my own profession."

"Even when you were recommended to me as a psychiatrist, I was warned against telling you about the observations. And if Janet ever heard a word of them, she *would* go mad."

"Prof. McNellis, I'm a grown man, I'm reasonably responsible. I may need that information to save your daughter's sanity."

The professor looked up hollow-eyed, at last meeting the doctor's gaze. "I'll chance it," he said. "Two months ago our moon telescope in the 24-hour-satellite, where the seeing isn't blurred by atmosphere, began to observe activity of an unknown nature in four separate areas of the moon: near Mare Nectaris, in Mare Foecunditatis, north of Mare Crisium, and in the moon's very center by Sinus Medii. It was impossible to determine the nature of the activity. At first we thought it was the Russians secretly got there ahead of us, but Space Intelligence disposed of that possibility. The observations themselves amounted simply to a limited and variable darkening in the four areas—shadows, you might say, though one viewer described what he saw as 'towers, some moving.'

"Then two days ago the survey ship went into orbit—purposely an orbit that would take it over Nectaris and Foecunditatis. On his first pass Tom Kimbro reported glimpsing at both sites—here I quote him verbatim—*spiderlike or skeletal machines, towering thin creatures not men, and evidence of deep shafts being dug.*"

The professor jerked to his feet. "That's all," he said with a rapid shrug. "Since that first report, the Project's cut me off from information too. Whatever else Tom's seen—either confirming or negating those first glimpses—and whatever's happened to him, I haven't been told."

The hall door opened. "Prof. McNellis," Mrs. Pulaski said, "isn't Janet here? She said she wanted to speak to you, but the outside door's open."

The professor looked guilt-struck at the doctor. "Do you suppose she was listening from the hall? That she heard me?" The doctor was already moving past Mrs. Pulaski.

He spotted Janet at once. Her quilted silk dressing gown stood out like white paint. She was standing in the center of the lawn, looking up over the roof.



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Motioning Mrs. Pulaski back and gripping the professor's arm for silence, he moved out beside the girl.

She did not seem to notice their approach. Her lips were working a little. Her thumbs kept lightly rubbing her fingertips. Her gaze, wide-eyed, staring, was fixed on the moon.

The doctor knew that his first concern should be for his patient, but now he realized that, even before that, he too must look at the moon.

Half black and merged with space, half faintly mottled white, Luna hung starkly, her glow blanking out all but the most brilliant nearby stars. She looked smaller to the doctor than he'd been thinking of her. He realized, with irrelevant guilt, that although he'd been thinking a lot about the moon in the past two years, he hadn't bothered to look at her often and certainly hadn't studied her.

"The four sites?" he heard himself ask softly.

"Three of them are near the curving outer edge of the illuminated half," the professor answered as quietly. "The fourth is right in the middle of the shadow line."

Janet did not appear to hear them. Then, with no more warning than a gasp of indrawn breath, she screamed.

The doctor shot his arm around her shoulders, but he did not take his gaze off the moon.

Two seconds passed. Perhaps three. The moon did not change.

Then, by the curving edge, he thought he saw three tiny smudges. He asked himself what they could be at a quarter of a million miles. Giant cracks many miles across? Huge sections lifting? He blinked his eyes to clear them.

Then he was looking at the violet stars. There were four of them, brighter than Venus, although three were in the illuminated half disk at the same spots where he'd seen the smudges. The fourth, brightest of all, was dead center, bisecting the straight boundary between the bright and dark halves of the disk.

He kept looking—it would have been completely beyond his power not to—but the psychiatrist-section of his mind, operating independently, made him say loudly, "I'm seeing it too, Janet! We're all seeing it. It's real!" He said that more than once, gripping her shoulders tightly each time he spoke.

He heard Prof. McNellis croak, "Ten seconds," and realized he must mean the time since the smudges appeared.

The violet stars were growing less glitteringly bright and at the same time they were expanding. They became violet balls or



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round spots, still brighter than the moon, but paling, as big at the moment as pingpong balls if you thought of the moon as a basketball, but they were growing.

"Explosion fronts," the professor whispered, continuing at intervals to croak the time.

Two of the spots, near the edge, overlapped without losing their perfect circularity. The central spot was still brightest, especially where it expanded into the dark half. The spots were big as tennis balls now, big as baseballs.

"Atomic charges. Have to be. Huge beyond imagining. Set *hundreds* of miles deep." The professor was still speaking in a whisper.

The doctor found he was hunching his shoulders in expectation of a shattering blast, then remembered there was no air to carry sound from the moon. Some day he must ask the professor how long it would take sound to get from the moon to the earth if there *were* air to carry it. He glanced at Janet and at the same moment she looked around at him questioningly. He simply nodded once, then they both looked up again.

The four spots all overlapped now, each grown to half the moon's diameter, and they were getting hard to see against the bright half—just a thin violet wash edged with deeper violet. Soon they were indistinguishable except for the one spreading from the moon's center across the dark side. For an eerie moment it outlined the dark edge of the moon with a violet semicircle, then vanished too.

"One minute," croaked the professor. "Blast-front speed 17 miles a second."

Where the first smudges and violet stars had been were now four dark marks, almost black. The central one was hardest to see—a jag in the shadow line. They were just large enough to show irregular edges to keen eyes.

"Blast holes. One hundred, two hundred miles across. As deep, probably deeper." The professor maintained his commentary.

Then they saw the chunks.

The ones blasted from the Crisium and Foecunditatis holes were already clear of the side of the moon and gleaming with reflected sunlight themselves. Three were large enough to show their jagged shape.

"The biggest. One twentieth moon diameter by eye. One hundred miles across. Big as the asteroid Juno. New Hampshire cubed."

It almost seemed possible to see the movement of the chunks. The doctor finally decided he



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couldn't quite. It was like trying to see the movement of the minute hand of a watch. Yet every time he blinked and looked back, they seemed to have fanned out a little farther.

"Four minutes."

It became clear that the chunks were moving at different apparent speeds. The doctor decided it might be because they had been thrown up at different angles. He wondered why he so wanted to keep watching them—perhaps so as not to have to think about them? He glanced at Janet. She seemed to be watching them with an almost relaxed interest. He probably need worry no more about her mind. Now that her fears had become something real and shared, she would hardly aberrate. No neuroses in wartime. One thing seemed likely about Janet, though—that she'd sensed the explosions telepathically. She'd screamed two or three seconds before he'd seen anything, and it takes light a second and a half to make the moon-earth trip.

There were some lights gleaming now on the dark side of the moon, near its center, one of them large enough to have an irregular appearance. Those must be chunks from Sinus Medii, the doctor told himself. He shivered.

The fastest moving Crisium chunks were now the moon's own width beyond the side of the moon.

"Eight minutes."

The professor's voice was almost normal again, though still hushed, as he calculated aloud, "One moon diameter in eight minutes. Round off to two thousand miles in five hundred seconds. Gives a chunk velocity of four miles a second. Needn't worry about the stuff from Crisium, Foecunditatis, even Nectaris. Won't come anywhere near us—miss earth by hundreds of thousands of miles. But the chunks from Medii are headed *here*, or near here. Starting near moon escape speed of a mile and a half a second it would take the chunks four days for the trip. But starting at around four miles a second, figure about one day. Yes, those Medii chunks should near-miss or hit us in about 24 hours—or at least close enough to that time so that we'll be on the impact side of earth."

When he finished he was no longer talking to himself and for the first time since the catastrophe began he had taken his eyes off the moon and was looking at his daughter and the doctor.

That he should be doing so was nothing exceptional. All over earth's evening side people who had been looking up in the sky were now looking around at each other.

The British Isles and West



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Africa missed the sight. There the moon, setting around midnight, had been down for a good hour.

In Asia and most of the Soviet Union it was day.

But all the Western Hemisphere—all the Americas—had a clear view of it.

The first conspicuous consequence was the rumor, traveling like a prairie fire, that the communist Russians were testing planet-killer bombs on the moon, or that World War Three had already started there. This rumor persisted long after Conelrad was on the air and the National Disaster Plan in effect. In the Eastern Hemisphere it metamorphosed into the rumor that the capitalist Americans, ever careless of the safety of the human race and invariably wasteful of natural resources, were ravishing Luna, ruining earth's only moon to satisfy the lusts of mad stockbrokers and insane artillery generals.

Less conspicuously, but quite as swiftly, the telescopes of the west began to sort out the Sinus Medii chunks and make preliminary estimates of their individual trajectories. Organized amateur meteor watchers rendered significant aid, particularly in keeping up to date, minute by minute, the map of the expanding chunk-jumble.

Very fortunately for the world, clear weather prevailed, cloud-cover everywhere was at a minimum—though in any case clouds could not have interfered with probably the most important telescope involved—that on the 24-hour satellite hanging 22,300 miles above the Pacific Ocean south of Mexico.

First observations added up to this: headed toward earth was a jumble of chunks ranging down in size from a planetoid ninety miles in diameter, a dozen fragments ten or more miles across, some three score of mass of the order of one cubic mile, and presumably any number of smaller chunks plus a thin cloud of moon-gravel and dust. They would reach the immediate vicinity of earth in almost exactly one day, conforming remarkably to Prof. McNellis' rough estimate. Those that entered earth's atmosphere would do so at a speed low for meteorites, yet high enough to burn up the very smallest and to ensure that the large chunks, little slowed by the air because of their great mass relative to cross-section, would strike the ground or the seas with impact speeds around six miles a second. The strike would be almost completely confined to the Western Hemisphere, clustering around the 120th meridian.

As soon as this last item of



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news was released, transocean airlines were besieged by persons loaded with money for tickets and bribes, and many did escape to the other side of the earth before most commercial planes were gone or grounded. Meanwhile numerous private planes took off on fantastically perilous transocean flights.

It was good that the telescopes of the Americas got to work swiftly. In six hours the earth's rotation had carried them out of sight of the moon and the Sinus swarm. First the Soviets and Asia, then Europe and Africa, moved into night and had their view of catastrophe hurtling down.

By that time the chunks from the three explosion sites on the moon's western rim had moved out far enough to be almost inconspicuous among the stars. But the Sinus swarm, steadily growing in apparent size and gradually fanning out, presented a brilliant spectacle, those against the dark half of the moon pocking it with points of light, those against the bright half more difficult to see but the largest visible as dark specks, while those that had fanned out most made a twinkling halo around Luna.

Asian and Russian, then European and African telescopes took up the task of charting chunk trajectories, ably supplementing the invaluable work of the moon 'scope in the 24-hour satellite, which kept up a steady flow of observation except for the two hours earth's intervening bulk cut it off from sight of the Sinus swarm. The satellite 'scope was especially helpful because, observing at radio-synchronized times in tandem with an earth 'scope, it was able to provide triangulations on a base some 25,000 miles long.

With incredulous shivers of relief it gradually became apparent that the 90-mile planetoid and many of the other large members of the swarm were going to shoot past earth on the side away from the sun. At first they had seemed to be the ones most on target, but since at a right angle to their explosion-velocity they all also had the moon's own orbital velocity of two-thirds of a mile a second, they drifted steadily east. A few might ruffle the top of the atmosphere, glowing in their passage, and all of them would go into long narrow elliptical orbits around earth, some of them perhaps slowing and falling in the far future, but that was now of less than no consequence.

It was in the chunks that had seemed sure to miss earth widely to the west that the danger lay. For these inevitably drifted east too—onto target.



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With maddening but unavoidable delays the major bulls-eye chunks were sorted out and their points of impact approximated, approximated more narrowly, and finally pinpointed. Once given, an evacuation order cannot be effectively rescinded, and an error of twenty miles in calculated point of impact would mean many evacuees fleeing to certain death.

By nightfall in London it was clear that a plus-ten-mile-diameter chunk would hit somewhere in the South Pacific and a plus-one-mile chunk in the American Northwest or British Columbia.

These two chunks were of special interest because they were the ones that the Russians and American moon-survey ships elected to ride down last.

Both survey ships had the good fortune to escape the blasts, and both had large fuel reserves since it had originally been planned that each should shift orbits several times during the survey. As soon as they became aware of the blasts and their effects each pilot independently decided that his greatest usefulness lay in matching trajectories with the Sinus swarm and riding it down to earth. Accordingly they broke out of their circumlunar orbits and blasted toward the twinkling jumble of moon-rock between them and the gleaming skyblue semicircle of earth, for them in half phase. As soon as, risking collisions with tailenders, they were able to report that they had caught up with the swarm, their radio signals were of unique service in determining the trajectory of the swarm, supplementing telescopic observations.

But the self-imposed task of the survey ships was to become even more perilous. By exactly matching trajectories with a large chunk—a matter largely of eyework and finicky correction blasts—and then holding that course for a matter of minutes, the survey ship's radio signals gave earth stations an exact fix on that chunk and its course, though at first there were confusions as to *which* chunk, judging by 'scope, the survey ship was matching orbits with. Thereafter it was for the pilots a matter of blasting gingerly over to the next major chunk, risking collision with minor fragments every second, and matching trajectories with *that*.

In its final trajectory-matching, the Russian ship satisfied earth stations that the plus-ten-mile chunk would land in the open Pacific midway between Baja California and Easter Island and between the Galapagos and Marquises. Warnings of giant waves had already gone out to the Pacific islands and



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coastal areas, but were now followed up with more specific alarms.

Immediately thereafter the Russian ship went out of radio contact 30,000 miles above the equator, possibly broached by one or more chunks while blasting sideways into a circumterran orbit. Its exact fate as a piece of matter was never known, but its performance was enshrined in men's hearts and helped raise the framework of the International Meteor Guard.

Twenty-two minutes later the 24-hour satellite had its own "curtain raising" encounter with the western edge of the swarm. It was twice holed, but its suited-up personnel effected repairs. A radarman was killed and the moon 'scope smashed.

Meanwhile both Americas had an unequalled sight of the Sinur swarm as earth's own shadow line moved from Recife to Quito and on from Halifax to Portland. As it approached its "comfortable" 1500-mile miss of earth, the 90-mile "Vermont-cubed" chunk attained the apparent size of the moon—a jagged moon, shaped like a stone arrowhead. Fierce soot-painted Indians discharged barbed arrows back at it from the banks of the Orinco, while at Walpi and Oraibi white-masked Hopi kachinas danced on imperturbably hour after hour.

Everywhere in the United States families sat outdoors or in their cars, listening to Conelrad, ready to move if advised. Already some were filing out like dispossessed ants from known danger points, crowding highways and railways, jamming the insides and clinging to the outsides of coaches, buses, and private cars, many simply legging it with their portable radios murmuring—most refugees tried to follow the insistently repeated advice from Conelrad to "keep listening for further possible revisions in your local impact points."

In a few cities there was a fairly orderly movement into bomb shelters. Stampedes, riots, and other disturbances were surprisingly few—the amazing spectacle in the night sky appeared to have an inhibiting effect.

Bizarre reactions occurred scatteredly. Some splinter religious and cultist groups gathered on hilltops to observe God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah. Others did the same thing simply for kicks, generally with the assistance of alcohol. A Greenwich Village group conducted solemn rooftop rites to propitiate the Triple Goddess in her role of Diana the Destroyer.

During the last hour several airports were invaded by survival-gangs and mobs convinced



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that only persons in the air when the swarm struck would survive the shock of impact, and a few overloaded planes, some commandeered, took off laboredly or crashed in the attempt.

Tom Kimbro rode the U. S. survey ship down along the final course of the plus-one-mile chunk, keeping about a quarter mile west of its raw gray side. While his ranging radio pulsed signals, he spoke a message over the voice circuit: "Ship's losing air. Must have sprung a seam on the last bump. But I'm safe in my suit. As I came from behind the moon on my last circuit, heading for the shadow line and Nectaris and just before I spotted the violet front and the Sinus chunks rising south, I think I saw *their* ships blasting away from the sun. There were five of them—skeletal ships—I could see the stars through them—with barely visible greenish jets. They set off those blasts like you'd set off firecrackers to scare dogs. I don't know. Give my love to Janet."

Immediately after that he successfully swung west into a braking orbit and brought down the ship safely next day on the Utah salt flats. His final trajectory-matching had helped pinpoint the exact spot near the center of the state of Washington where the Big Chunk would land.

The moon is made of rock that averages out a little more than three times as heavy as water. The Big Chunk had a mass of rather more than a thousand million tons. Its impact at almost six miles a second would release raw energy equivalent to about 1500 nominal atomic bombs (Hiroshima type), nothing unimaginable in an era of fusion bombs. There would not be the initial chromatic electromagnetic flash (heat, light, gamma rays) of an atomic weapon. A typical mushroom cloud would be raised, but the fallout would be clean, lacking radioactives. The blast wave would be the same, the earth shock heavier.

The Big Chunk would be only one of several almost as large hitting the Western Hemisphere along with almost countless other moon meteorites, many of them large enough to produce impact energy in the atomic-bomb range.

As the Sinus swarm traveled the last few hundred miles to impact or by-pass, gleaming with reflected sunlight in earth's night sky like so many newborn stars, a few showing jagged shapes, there was a breathtaking transformation. Beginning (for North American viewers) with those to the south, but rapidly traveling north across the sky, the lights of the Sinus swarm winked out as the chunks



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plunged into earth's shadow. To watchers it was as if the chunks had vanished. Some persons fell on their knees and gave thanks, believing that they had witnessed a miracle—a last-minute divine intervention. Then, again starting toward the south, dark red sparks began to glow almost where the Sinus lights had been and in the same general pattern, as the chunks entered the atmosphere and were heated toward incandescence by friction with air molecules.

Beginning in southern California, but swiftly fanning out north and east, every state in the Union had its own Great Sinus Shower. Dazzling ribbons and trails, ionization glows, heat glows, strange radio hissings and roars that came from the ground itself (energized by massive radio emanations from chunk trails in the ionosphere), explosions in the air as a few chunks tortured by heat blew apart, then the walloping deafening blast waves of the impacts, meteor-booms as their roar of passages finally caught up with the chunks, dust clouds spurting up to blanket the stars, wildly eddying winds, re-echoing reverberations.

Then, at last, silence.

Every state in the Union had its casualties, heroisms, and freaks. Seven hundred deaths were subsequently verified, grimly settling once and for all the niggling old dispute as to whether a human being had ever really been killed by a meteorite, and it was assumed that at least three hundred more perished unrecorded. The city of Globe, Arizona, was destroyed by a direct hit after a commendably orderly and thorough evacuation. Three telephone girls at a town near Emporia, Kansas, and four radarmen at an early warning station north of Milwaukee stayed phoning Get-Out warnings and making last-minute observations until it was too late to escape physically from their point-of-impact posts. The inhabitants of a Saskatchewan village took a road 9 to death instead of a road 5 to safety, victims of someone's slovenly articulation. A Douglas DC-9 was struck and smashed in midair. A strike in the Texas Panhandle released a gusher of oil. A 25-square-block slum on Chicago's south side, long slated for clearance, was razed meteoritically.

Except within miles of major impact points, ground shock was surprisingly slight, less than that of a major earthquake, seismograph recordings nowhere indicating energy releases higher than 5 on Richter's logarithmic scale.

The giant waves did not quite live up to expectations either



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and although according to some calculations the Pacific Chunk should have raised the water level of earth's oceans by four hundredths of an inch, this increase was never verified by subsequent measurement. Nor was any island of moon rock miles high created in the Pacific —only the Sinus Shoal, formed by the break-up of the Pacific Chunk on impact and the distribution of its fragments across the bottom. At the time of the impact several fishing boats, private yachts, and one small steamer were never heard from again and presumably engulfed. Another steamer had its back broken by the first giant surge and sank, but its crew successfully abandoned ship and survived to a man, as did three persons on a balsa raft. These last claimed afterwards to have seen the Pacific Chunk at close range "hanging in the sky like a red-hot mountain." Hours later, California, Mexican, and South American beaches were impressively slopped over and there was some loss of life in the Hawaiian Islands, though the inhabitants of the 50th state were by then far more interested in the volcanic eruption that had been touched off by the odd chance of a sizable moon-chunk falling into one of the craters of the volcano Mauna Loa.

Alaska, eastern Siberia, and most of the Pacific Islands reported daytime meteor roars and some scattered impacts—including the spectacular spray plumes of ocean strikes—while by an almost amusing coincidence the widely separated cities of Canberra, Yokohama, and the town of Okhotsk were each simultaneously terrorized by a daytime meteor that glowed and roared miles (some said yards!) above the rooftops and then reportedly departed into space again without striking anywhere.

Janet McNellis, her father, and Dr. Snowden rode out the Washington blast with no great discomfort in the Professor's bomb shelter, though the doctor always afterwards looked a bit sourly at people who spoke of the "trivial" earthquake effects of the Great Sinus Shower. By dawn the dust had cleared sufficiently, the great mushroom cloud blowing away east, so that they had a clear view from their hilltop of a considerable segment of the blast area, on the margin of which they had survived.

The house behind them had its walls and roof buckled somewhat, but had not collapsed. The glass had been blown out of all the windows, although they had been left open before impact. Everywhere the white paint was smoothly shaded with green, as though by a giant airbrush—the



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great fist of the blast wave had worn a green glove of leaves and pine needles.

The naked trees from which the latter had been stripped marched disconsolately down the hillside. About a mile away these standing wooden skeletons began to give way to a limitless plain of bare-trunked fallen trees that the blast had combed as neatly as straight hair. As one studied them it became apparent that the fallen trunks radiated out from a blast center beyond the horizon and some fifteen miles away.

"Precisely like Kulik's photographs of the impact site of the Great Siberian Meteor of 1908!" Prof. McNellis commented.

Janet sighed and snuggled her coat a little more warmly around her. "You know," she remarked, "I don't think I'm going to have any more moon nightmares."

"I don't imagine you will," Dr. Snowden said carefully. "Earth has now received the warning of which your telepathic dreams, and those of many others, were a prevision."

"You think they really were telepathic?" she asked half skeptically.

He nodded.

"But *why* a warning?" the professor demanded. "Why *such* a warning? Why not at least talk to us first?"

He seemed to be asking the questions more of the bare tree-trunks than of his daughter or the doctor, nevertheless the latter ventured a speculative answer.

"Maybe *they* don't think we're worth talking to, only worth scaring. I don't know. Maybe they *did* talk to us—maybe that's what the dreams were. They might be a telepathic race, you know, and assume the same means of communication in others. Maybe they only set off their intimidation-blasts after we didn't answer them, or seemed to answer insanely."

"Still, *such* a warning."

The doctor shrugged. "Perhaps they thought it was exactly what we deserve. After all, we must seem a menacing species in some respects—reaching out for the stars when we're still uncertain as to whether it wouldn't be best for one half of our race to destroy the other half." He sighed. "On the other hand," he said, "maybe some of the creatures with whom we share the universe are simply not sane by our standards. Maybe if we knew all we could know about them with our limited minds, we'd still judge them maniacs. I don't know. What we do know now is something we should have known all the time: that we're not the only inhabitants of the galaxy and obviously not—yet—the most powerful."

**THE END**



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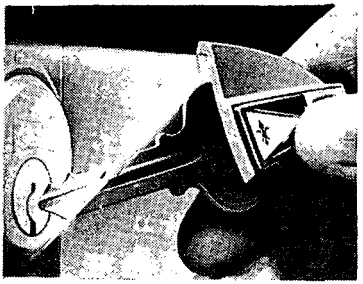

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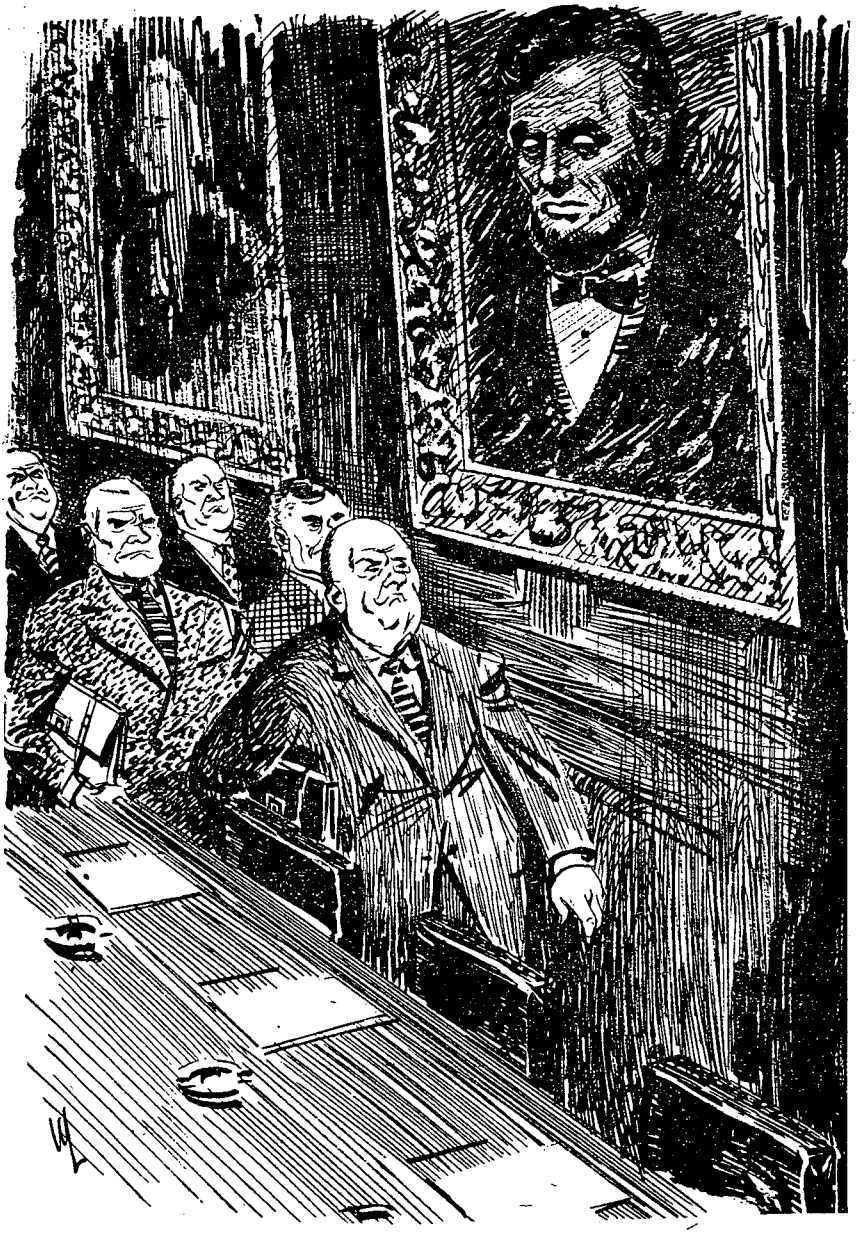



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# RED MOON RISING

By ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATOR LLEWELLYN

*Washington was appalled when Moscow announced a scientific triumph that made Sputnik look like a child's toy. Our leaders had to make a quick decision—with a gun pointed at their heads.*

I'LL never forget the day they launched the big one.

At precisely four o'clock I was sitting in my little unpadded cell here at *Globe News*, pounding out the usual daily stint for a Washington dateline column called *The View from Washington's Monument.*

At precisely one minute after four the bulletins started coming in over the wire up front.

My office is way down at the end of the corridor, but within three minutes the bedlam had reached a pitch where I couldn't work any longer. I got up and joined the crowd in the front layout.

From the noise and the milling



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around, you'd think they were doing the Christmas Party bit. Until you got a look at their faces.

I realized what had happened at once.

Somebody had pushed the panic button.

About the time I managed to squeeze my way clear of the corridor, McGregor climbed up on top of his desk and everybody shut up.

It was the sight of him there that did it. McGregor isn't the kind of a man who stands on desk, and we all knew it. The effect was as shocking as seeing Albert Schweitzer sitting in with Louis Armstrong at a Newport Jazz Festival.

Any tendency to murmur a comment about this was effectively stilled by a glimpse of McGregor's face. I've been with Globe for a good many years, and I'd never seen him so stunned—not even on the night that Truman clobbered Dewey.

Then he held up his hand and started to read.

Now it would be nice to pretend I have total recall, but the truth is that I can't give a single word of direct quotes. I was too stunned to remember; I could only react, as we all reacted.

But I got the message.

There was another satellite in the sky.

Another Sputnik had been launched.

And its estimated weight was in the neighborhood of fifty tons.

That's right. *One hundred thousand pounds.*

No official confirmation had been received yet, of course—but it wasn't necessary. Some eight million citizens had seen the satellite in orbit as it passed over Los Angeles and environs. Signals had already been picked up as it continued its progress.

It wasn't a gag, it wasn't a flying saucer, it wasn't a publicity stunt for Mike Todd's birthday.

The sword of Damocles was hanging over our head, and it weighed fifty tons.

Runners kept pushing through to McGregor with fresh bulletins, and somewhere along the line he stopped reading them and began calling out names. So-and-so to check the rival news-services and the TV networks immediately; so-and-so to contact our sources on the Geophysical Year project, at once; so-and-so to the Pentagon, pronto; so-and-so to the White House, soonest.

I turned away. I didn't expect to be called; when it came to questions of actual news, *The View from Washington's Monument* was pretty dim.

That's why I was startled when I heard my name blasted out. I got up to the desk in nothing flat, and McGregor gave me a glare which told me I should have made better time.

"Where's Carling?" he snapped.

"I don't know. It's his day off, isn't it? Have you tried—"



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"Yes, we tried his apartment. And we tried the Mayflower Bar and that joint down on B Street, too. You're a buddy of his. What else would he be doing on his day off?"

"I—"

"Never mind. Go out and find him, fast."

"Right. It'll take me just five minutes to finish up on the column, and then—"

This wasn't my day for finishing sentences. McGregor, like the true executive he was, disposed of my column in a few well-chosen words.

I went straight back to my cubicle and picked up my hat and coat. In order to save time, I didn't even stop to do what he'd suggested I do with my column.

There was no need to emphasize the importance of finding Carling. At a time like this, Globe News could use his services. Leonard Carling was Science Editor. He'd copped a Pulitzer for his series on the Los Alamos Project a few years ago. A yarn like this could easily win him another.

*If* I could find him.

Actually, I had a pretty fair idea of where he might be. There was a little spot around the corner from his place, run by a bartender who detested rock-n'-roll and put his own collection of records on the juke box. Sometimes, on his day off, Carling would squeeze into a back booth and listen to a stack—stuff like the old Raymond Scott Quintet numbers on the Brunswick label.

I managed to flag down a taxi on the street and gave the driver the address. Apparently he had not heard about the satellite yet, because he had nothing to say. This suited me. If I found Carling, he'd do plenty of talking. As a matter of fact, he already had.

On the face of it, our friendship was a very offbeat item. Carling wasn't just another wire-service reporter; he had quite an educational background, including the M. I. T. bit. As for me, I know just enough about science to change a washer—and even there I rely more on profanity than technological know-how. But somehow, we enjoyed each other's company. Maybe it was because both of us were divorced.

Carling thought so. I remember how he'd analyzed it one night. "It isn't so much that we're lonely," he said. "Each of us has our friends. But we lack sounding-boards. That's a wife's function, you know. To serve as a sounding-board for her lord and master. To listen to all his gripes, all the complaints, all the wild ideas and foolish theories. I used to talk to Lucy about the nucleonics projects twenty-four hours a day. Come to think of it, maybe that's why she divorced me. At least *you're* willing to listen."

I was. Maybe I couldn't dig the scientific terminology, but his opinions always interested me. Even lately, when he'd begun



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to get very downbeat about the Red satellites and our own failures.

"You haven't seen anything yet!" he'd predicted, in that we-are - gathered - here - to - pay - our - last - sorrowful - tribute voice of his, just the other night. "The next one is going to be the clincher."

I didn't ask him how he knew.

Leonard Carling, on the basis of his reputation, had *entree* to high official circles and even higher unofficial circles. Much of his information came from the latter; he couldn't write it for publication, but he got the word.

And now his prophecy had come true.

So I was quite lathered up when I walked into the little bar and spotted Carling's gray crew-cut rising over the top of the rear booth. The place was almost empty; the bartender stood down front talking to a couple of Department of Agriculture stenographer types who were making faces at the juke box. The juke box didn't care; it went right on playing an old John Kirby number.

Leonard Carling looked up and smiled at me.

"Sit down," he said.

I shook my head. "Grab your socks," I told him. "McGregor wants you."

"Does he know where I am?"

"Of course not. But he sent me out to find you, and I guessed."

"So you couldn't locate me." He gestured. "Sit down and have an ale."

"No time. Wait'll you hear the news."

"About the satellite?" He shrugged. "The bulletin came over TV ten minutes ago. Fifty tons, I think they said."

I stared at him. "Well, aren't you going to do something about it?"

"I *am* doing something about it. I'm drinking ale. Care to join me?"

He signalled the bartender before I could object. I slumped into the seat opposite him when the bartender came and waited until he brought our order and went away again. John Kirby's outfit began to play *Rose Room*.

"I suppose McGregor wants me to check at top-level," he mused, pouring his ale carefully. "I imagine he'd like some interviews."

"Of course. So put on your coat and—"

"No, thanks. I brought in enough interviews when the earlier Sputniks were launched. Let him rewrite them. I guarantee the story will be the same."

He was using that funeral-oration voice of his, but somehow it sounded very appropriate. I listened.

"The first interview would be with the top brass, wouldn't it? You know what they'll tell me. The military geniuses who claimed they needed billions to keep us ahead of Russia in national defense will say this only proves they need *more* billions to keep us ahead. The big boys who



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went around bragging about how America is always first in the technology race will issue statements denying there ever *was* a technology race. The politicians who did their best to get rid of all the egghead scientists will loudly proclaim that we need *more* egghead scientists. None of these people see a real Sputnik in the sky—all they see up there is a political football."

"But the man in the street—" I began.

"As for the man in the street, he doesn't see *anything*. When the first satellite was launched, there was plenty of publicity—but actually, the average citizen was more interested in whether or not the Braves would win the World Series. Of course, his wife was more excited when the second Sputnik went up—because of the dog. The way it struck her, it was a moral victory for our side; *we* would never send a poor, helpless little puppy to its doom that way! Then the dog died, and the public forgot the whole thing."

"They won't forget *this* one," I said. "There's a hundred thousand pounds up there. They saw it with the naked eye on the West Coast, and it'll be visible to the whole country on its orbital course. By tomorrow morning there'll be hell to pay. And you're still willing to sit here and make with the cheap cynicism."

"I'm using only the most expensive cynicism. The most costly, shall we say?"

"Either you're drunk or you've flipped," I told him. "But if you don't snap out of it, half the world will be drunk or flipping within twenty-four hours. This thing is big enough to hold a dozen men. Is it a manned satellite? Maybe it's armed. Maybe it'll be followed by rockets with warheads. Aren't you interested in finding out?"

"Certainly. And in due time, Von Braun and Arthur C. Clarke will write articles on the subject."

"Be serious, won't you? I'm no scientist, but this thing scares hell out of me."

"Yes." He nodded slowly. "You're scared. And, as you say, everybody will be frightened by tomorrow. So my going out and getting interviews won't help the situation. Something more must be done."

"Such as sitting here and drinking, I suppose?"

"Exactly. It so happens I'm here by appointment. In a little while I expect a visitor. If our meeting goes as I think it might, it may be that I shall really be able to help."

"A visitor? Who?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

"You mean you already contacted a guy who—"

"He contacted me. I decided, under the circumstances, it would be wisest not to meet at my apartment. Therefore, I selected the semi-privacy of this establishment."

"Well, why didn't you say so in the first place? Just clue me in a



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little so I can tell McGregor what you're doing."

"No. There must be no interference. When I'm certain of my facts, I'll notify him. Until then, just say that you couldn't find me."

"Look, at least give me a hint. Why all the hush-hush? Did you locate a leak somewhere? Is this government stuff?"

He shook his head.

I lowered my voice. "All right, let me guess. You're onto the Soviet angle, isn't that it? Somebody's willing to spill the inside story of how they did it. That must be it. Right?"

"Don't ask any questions. Now, run along. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," I echoed and went away. Wondering if there would *be* a tomorrow.

A nasty conviction was beginning to filter through to me. Talk about the propaganda value of the previous Sputniks—*this* was the real thing! One look at the Red moon in the sky tonight and the man in the street might very well become the man in the cellar, the man under the bedclothes, cowering and waiting for the first bomb to fall.

I thought about it as I drank my dinner down the street. Then, as the evening wore on, I thought about it some more.

Talk about the Christmas Party bit, or New Year's Eve! The streets were jammed and the bars were crowded. Everybody was talking, everybody was yelling, everybody was drinking. But there was one difference—nobody was laughing or even smiling.

They had heard the word.

The word, out of Chicago, when the Red moon came over and the panic-stricken motorists abandoned their cars in the middle of Outer Drive.

The word, out of a small town in Pennsylvania, where an obscure religious leader of a still more obscure sect saw the sphere in the sky as a period proclaiming the end of the world and—gathering his fanatical followers—set fire to the buildings of the entire community.

The word, out of Boston, of riots in Scollay Square.

The Soviet Government must have anticipated this reaction, counted on it when they launched their miniature moon.

*Miniature,* hell! It weighed fifty tons. What kind of initial thrust had been necessary to launch a satellite of this size? With that kind of power, they could speed nuclear warheads around the world and back again. Maybe they'd be doing just that, soon.

Maybe they *were* doing it, now.

The Sputnik was circling above the globe, but the rumors circled even more swiftly down in the streets, rising from the saliva-flecked launching - platforms of human lips.

"Jeez, did you hear the latest? Air Force spotted Red bombers comin' over Alaska . . ."



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"Yeah, they hit Seattle. They must of, I was listening to CBS news and it was supposed to be a roundup, they said for Seattle to come in, and then they right away switched back to New York . . ."

"I have it on good authority, I tell you! Everything west of the Mississippi has been blacked out. The President will issue an emergency proclamation any minute now . . ."

"Shut up about the damn thing and let's get ourselves a drink!"

"—and what I want to know is, why hasn't the President gone on the air with a statement? I tell you the whole thing is part of a conspiracy, we've sold out to save our necks, and—"

"What I'm gonna do is climb in the car and get the hell out of town, right now. There's hills over in West Virginia where they'll never find you . . ."

"Who cares *how* much it costs? A fat lot of good it's going to do to save your money *now*, George!"

"I'm *scared.*"

"Why doesn't somebody *do* something?"

"Have another drink!"

"To hell with you!"

"*To hell with everybody!*"

And that's the way it went; on the streets, in the bars, up and down Pennsylvania and along Connecticut and halfway to Chevy Chase. It wasn't a mob-scene yet, even though the cops weren't in evidence and nobody was bothering to obey the traffic signals. The character who was thinking about West Virginia was a little more farsighted than his fellows; maybe by tomorrow at this time there would be a wild exodus from this city and from every city, but tonight it was mainly a matter of restless wandering and hysterical wondering. And finally it all blended into a blur of *I'm scared why doesn't somebody do something, have a drink and to hell with you,* over and over and over again until *I* was scared and wanted somebody to do something and wanted a drink—and then *I* said to hell with it.

And elbowed my way back along the streets until I came to the little bar where I'd left Leonard Carling.

He was gone, of course. The bartender said he'd left over an hour ago. Yes, he'd had company in the back booth—a little fellow with dark glasses. They'd talked for quite a while, and then he went away. Carling stuck around for another drink and then vanished.

I looked at my watch. It was almost eleven o'clock. Carling had gone home.

So I walked around the corner to his apartment. The crowd was streaming past, and I paid no attention to any of the faces wavering before me. It wasn't until a man hurried out of the doorway and jostled me just as I walked in that I bothered to take a second look. He disappeared in



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the mob before I got a glimpse of his face; I couldn't even see if he wore dark glasses or not.

Do Russian spies wear dark glasses, or is that corny? Are Russian spies corny, with or without dark glasses? Carling hadn't really admitted anything to me.

But I'd admitted one thing to myself. Corny or not, I was frightened. For myself, for Carling, for everybody.

And I got up those stairs, fast. I hurried down the hall to his apartment door, started to press the buzzer. Then I noticed, with a shock, that light was streaming across the carpet. His door was ajar.

I pushed it open, catching sight of Carling's profile as he sat behind his desk staring out the window.

My first reaction was relief; my second, indignation. I stormed up to him.

"Don't you know any better than to leave the door open?" I muttered. "What's the matter, have you got a hole in your head?"

I crossed the room in five steps. As my feet thudded across the floor, Carling nodded. At least, I thought he was nodding, then realized he was swaying and falling forward, out of the chair.

But not before I saw his forehead.

Leonard Carling *did* have a hole in his head.

They didn't let me go until past noon the following day, and even then I was lucky.

I was lucky because there were fingerprints all over the room; Carling's and somebody else's—not mine. I hadn't even touched the doorknob when I came in.

I was lucky because the bartender told a straight story about my meeting with Carling and how I'd come back to find him, less than five minutes before I phoned the police about the discovery of his body.

I was lucky because they listened to what I told them about my encounter with Carling, and how I'd seen a stranger come out of the place just before I found him.

But even so, I doubt if they would have let me go—even on bail, as a material witness—if McGregor hadn't pulled strings in high places. Not with the D. C. police force, either, but with the Federal boys. Yes, they were in on it from the first. They were great on listening and not much on talking, but I managed to find out one thing which confirmed my own suspicions—Carling had evidently made some connections with the Reds.

That he was a traitor I could not and didn't believe. That the man he'd met in the tavern was a Soviet agent was still a matter of conjecture. That the man who killed him was the same person seemed even more dubious. It was much more likely that he'd managed to contact a defecting agent who gave him some information—but that *another* agent



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had then trailed him and killed him immediately. The crime was clumsily and hastily committed; evidently it was of the utmost importance to get him out of the way before he could reveal what he had learned.

But it was all theory.

And now we'd never know what he *had* found out.

"Maybe I can really help," he'd said.

Well, it was too late now.

That's what I told McGregor, driving back along Pennsylvania after they turned me loose.

He sighed. "You're right, it *is* too late now. But I doubt if he could have found out anything that would stop this."

"What're you talking about?"

He blinked at me. "I forgot, you've been under wraps for fourteen hours, haven't you? You didn't hear about the press conference."

"Where? The White House?"

McGregor sighed again. "I wish to God that's where it was. But things have changed. This one is scheduled for two o'clock —at the Soviet Embassy."

"The Reds called—?"

He still wasn't letting me finish my sentences. "The Reds are calling everything," he muttered. "Including the shots. This is top level. The Soviet Government refused to issue any statement in reply to the questions of our own State Department last night or this morning. Instead, they set up this conference at the Embassy. Only the news service reps are to be admitted; two from each agency. And if our officials want to find out what's going on, they'll have to come and beg admittance."

"But that's fantastic!"

"What isn't?" He chewed on his pipe. "Is it fantastic that New York City is being evacuated? That a National Emergency has been proclaimed? That this damned Red moon is putting the fear of death into the citizens of Dubuque and bringing psychosis to Peoria?

"Don't you worry—our big wheels will roll into the Soviet Embassy this afternoon. You'll see them there."

I stared at him.

"That is, if you're up to it. I've got permission for two representatives from our outfit. Naturally, I wanted to cover it myself. If Carling were alive, God rest him, he'd be the other one. But in view of what happened, I thought of you. Not because of what you can write, but because of the tie-in with the story. Human interest angle, get it?" He laughed, but there was no mirth in his mouth. "Human interest! I wonder if any of us will give a damn about human interest by this time tomorrow?"

We turned off; we were approaching the Embassy now. Crowds boiled along the streets, but National Guardsmen had cleared an inner lane.

"What do you think is going to happen?" I asked.

Again the lifeless laughter came. "Isn't it obvious? The



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Reds have won the war before it's started. They weren't ready to risk a sneak attack and they weren't going to sit back and wait for us to try and catch up to their scientists, either. How they ever managed to get this thing into the sky I'll never understand—but the point is, they did it. Which means they have the power to blast their bombs anywhere in the world.

"This so-called 'press conference' is merely a public gesture. Actually, I doubt if anybody is going to get a chance to ask questions. We'll be *told*. And it won't be a matter of issuing a prepared statement. What we're going to hear is an ultimatum. They're going to dictate terms of surrender. It's all out in the open, now—an *either-or* proposition."

"Do you think we'll accept it?"

"What choice do we have?"

We were parking now. The gates of the Embassy loomed ahead. McGregor fumbled in his coat, handed me a wallet.

"It's yours," he said. "Identification and credentials for this clambake. They'll be strict."

They *were* strict. And once inside, there was none of the old-style red-carpet-and-champagne treatment. As we assembled in the big hall I didn't even notice the usual buffet and bar setup for the press. More significant still, I saw no neat stacks of printed handouts awaiting distribution for after the conference.

We took our places on hard chairs, before a long table. I recognized a number of the boys from the other outfits: AP, UP, INS, the radio and TV networks. They weren't fraternizing; just sitting glumly. Then the top-level people started coming in, and they were even glummer.

McGregor nudged me. "See, what did I tell you?" he whispered, fiercely. "The House, the Senate, the whole damned Cabinet! Plus the Chiefs of Staff and—"

I nudged him back. "There," I murmured. "Two seats ahead. The little fellow with the dark glasses!"

"You're crazy! You mean the one the bartender said was talking to Carling? It couldn't be—"

"I'm going to find out," I began, and started to rise.

McGregor pulled me back.

"Not now," he said. "Here it comes!"

The doors had closed behind us and now another door opened at the end of the room. A half-dozen men filed in, all of them wearing the uniform of the Soviet Army. They took their places at the big table. Suddenly the room became quiet—deadly quiet.

Then the fat man walked out.

He wasn't smiling and he wasn't waving, the way he usually did in the newsreels. He merely moved to the head of the table, then stood there and stared.

There was an audible rustle as he took a paper from his pocket



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and laid it on the table before him. Quite deliberately he donned spectacles. Then he picked up the paper and started to read.

McGregor had guessed right. This was no press conference—not even the pretense of one.

What we were listening to was a demand for unconditional surrender.

Again, there's no sense pretending that I can give direct quotes. The guttural voice droned on; sometimes the pompous phrases blurred, but the meaning was always clear.

As I listened, I glanced at the little man wearing the dark glasses. He sat there, hunching forward, his head protruding from the neck of his big overcoat, and in profile he resembled a turtle peering out of his carapace. The dark glasses contributed to the effect, as did his mittened hands, which twisted nervously in his lap as he listened to the ultimatum.

The guttural voice droned on.

There was no sense in maintaining a pretense any longer, the voice told us. The time for meaningless diplomacy was past. There was no more need for hypocritical protestations of friendship. Since we, as a nation, had persisted in our warmongering efforts in spite of every reasonable warning, it had been decided to take steps. Once and for all, it would be demonstrated that the Rusisan Soviet Federated Socialist Republic had the might, as well as the right, to assume world leadership. We had just witnessed the first portion of that demonstration.

Now we would be given the opportunity to respond to it. A detailed agreement had been drawn up which would establish our future relationship, and in a moment its terms would be outlined.

However, if for any reason these terms were ignored, it would be necessary to allow the demonstration to proceed. We had already seen the Russian satellite. It was to be fervently hoped that we would not require a first-hand experience of comparable Russian advances in the field of thermonuclear warfare.

"Yesterday," the guttural voice proclaimed, "the Soviet Union launched a Red moon. Tomorrow we launch a Red world!"

I had been watching the turtle-profile of the man in the dark glasses. Now I was startled to see him move; though not half as startled as the Soviet spokesman when he rose and took three paces forward, facing the room.

"He lies!"

The voice was even deeper than that of the official Soviet spokesman. Deeper, and more compelling. "He lies!" the voice repeated.

"No, let me speak. You understand, of course, that it will do no good to try and harm me."

Suddenly, shockingly, the fat face of the Soviet leader began to sag. "Who are you?" he murmured. "How did you come here?"



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"The credentials I presented state that I am Leonard Carling," the stranger said. "This, of course, is a falsehood, for Leonard Carling is dead—murdered by one of your agents, no doubt, after I talked to him last night.

"Originally, it had been planned that Leonard Carling be here today, to bring you the truth. He was selected on the basis of his reputation, as a proper, unbiased representative. Now he is dead, and I must speak for him.

"What he was prepared to tell you was quite simple. It is this. There is no Russian satellite in the sky today."

The Soviet leader did not move. The uniformed men did not rise to shoot the stranger. The crowd did not murmur. The silence in that room was thick as solid glass.

"I repeat—there is no Russian satellite in the sky today. And the Russians know it. That is why they dare not harm me. Because there would be retaliation—far worse than anything with which they have threatened you.

"Naturally, they had no way of knowing just what the satellite really was. All they realized was that they had not launched it; could not possibly have launched an instrument of such magnitude. When no statement was forthcoming from your government, and panic spread, they knew no so-called western power was responsible. It was then decided to take a daring gamble; to capitalize on the general assumption that this was a Russian satellite and call for your surrender.

"It was in anticipation of this that Leonard Carling was approached and given the truth. Since he is no longer able to speak, you must listen to me."

I wanted to believe him. And yet I had to know. Before I realized it, I was on my feet, my voice thinly insistent.

"What proof have we got? How can we be sure this isn't just another trick—that you didn't murder him yourself?"

The turtle-profile turned to face me.

"I am not totally unfamiliar with your police methods," the deep voice intoned. "According to my understanding, there is the question of fingerprints found in Leonard Carling's apartments. In order to leave fingerprints, one must have—fingers."

And the mittened hands rose and twisted, the mittens fell to the floor. I, and everyone in the room, saw what they had concealed—the *pink, webbed paws.*

The pink, webbed paws that rose, now, sweeping off the dark glasses and revealing the place where the eyes *should* have been, and the short, blunted stalks which took their place in the rimmed sockets and evidently fulfilled their function in some unearthly way. Some *unearthly* way—

"I see I have convinced you in this matter," the voice contin-



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ued. "And I trust I am equally convincing in my other statements to you. When I tell you that the satellite in the sky is not a creation of Russia or any other nation. To be quite specific, it is *not* a satellite. You might call it a 'spaceship', but even this term is inadequate. It is best that you think of it as a *warning*.

"I do not presume to threaten, but I can advise. I suggest that all of you—as official representatives or as common citizens of your various governments—instantly abandon any further efforts to place 'artificial moons' in orbit. I suggest you turn your eyes away from the stars and contemplate, with renewed honesty and insight, the spectacle of life here on your own earth. You have much to do here.

"The time may come when you have achieved the vision to go beyond. But you are not presently prepared or qualified; your motives and attitudes can lead only to self-destruction.

"I ask you to convey this message to the world at large, and to act upon it. For the span of a lunar month, we shall continue to orbit the earth. If you cooperate within that time, we shall leave you. If, however, you do not comply, we shall be forced to take—further measures.

"But I sincerely hope this will not prove necessary. And once again, I urge you to heed my warning.

"I suggest that you abandon the satellite race and consider the human race."

That was the end. The end of his speech and the end of his presence among us. I didn't have to ask how it was that he managed to get by the stake-out at Leonard Carling's apartment and acquire his wallet and credentials. If you can disappear into thin air at will, you undoubtedly can appear at will, too.

The point is, *you can't*. And *I* can't.

*We* happen to be human.

And as for him—

Well, all this happened about ten days ago, and the thing in the sky is still orbiting on schedule.

But the universal treaties have been signed, and the whole peace program is going forward, and chances are he'll carry out his part of the bargain and take the object away at the end of the month.

Meanwhile, habit is a funny thing. The papers, and most people, still refer it to as a Red moon.

Oddly enough, they *could* be right at that. According to the way I heard it, Russia isn't the only thing that's Red.

Seems to me there's also a Red planet out there.

Some day, maybe, we'll have a chance to find out for ourselves, first-hand.

Some day. . . .

**THE END**



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# THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY

By ROSEL GEORGE BROWN

*The hospital needed Dr. Hisel. He was a fine physician. He was also a Martian. And therein lies the problem.*

"THAT'S tomato catsup," Quintius Greene, out in Oregon, informed his wife. "Look at those actors! And see—oh, no! A comic character, no less."

Dr. Hisel, his chest bare and his lungs flapping mightily, came pushing through the white-robed circle just as the anesthetist, or rather hypnotist, leaned over to check the patient's blood pressure. She whispered something to Dr. Crayton, who was using his scissors in the open chest cavity.

The audience was not perturbed. Millions of Americans munched on decalorizing bars and thought uplifting thoughts about the grandeurs of science and the state of their own internal organs. And oh, how they loved operations in the round, and particularly in color! You could practically reach out and let the blood drip over your fingers.

Dr. Crayton did the operation himself because he was a neat, masterful-looking surgeon and he never let blood squirt on his uniform or dropped his operating lenses into the incision. One doesn't do this sort of thing for advertising, but it is uplifting for people with money to leave to medical institutions.

Mrs. Greene eyed Dr. Hisel disapprovingly, finished her decalorizing bar and reached for a chocolate cream. "What's he doing?"

"Following the script," Mr. Greene said, outraged. "Relax. They always end well."

But Dr. Crayton's medicinal calm was indeed shattered. The look he gave Dr. Hisel was enough to turn the Gor-



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gon's head into a ceramic fuel tank. He meant business.

Hisel was a much misunderstood man. Mostly because he had a heavy Martian accent and everything he said sounded either hilarious or sinister, depending on how many drinks you had had.

At the hospital the nurses would follow him around surreptitiously just to hear him say things like, "Madam, your schild hhas honly ha bad hattack of whwhhwhhooping schhoughh." He really went off on something like the "wh" in whooping cough, because when Martians aspirate all out they use their extra lungs and you can hear them close with a "flap" before the word goes on.

Dr. Hisel had his faults and surgical nurses frequently collapsed after his operations. As a Martian, Dr. Hisel was accustomed to strong-impulse telepathy, and frequently just held his hand out, expecting the nurse to know what to put in it. And a look would pass from the surgical nurse to the circulating nurse and around among the interns and finally Dr. Hisel would say, "For Hhhwhran's *sake!* Scalpel!" And then if the nurse slapped the scalpel into his hand, as she had been taught, he'd roar like a bull, because he peeled off his epithelium before an operation instead of using gloves. And then, he didn't say, "stat," for haemostat, as other doctors do. He said "haemo," which usually came out as a flap of his extra lungs.

So his directives frequently sounded like—Pause. For Hhhwhran's sake! Scalpel. Qcqvttt! Pause. *Scissors.* Flap. Unprintable word! (Mostly aspirates with uvular overtones).

It was for this and similar reasons, besides a purely personal prejudice, that Dr. Crayton, who was head of Bayside Memorial Hospital, decided that Hisel should be dispensed with.

It is no easy matter to dispose of a staff doctor. Firing is considered gauche. The best method is to find him a better offer from elsewhere. But Hisel did not rise to better offers. He was engrossed in his work and he knew his way around the hospital and he had a good robotic apartment and a good mechanic for his car and a good laundry. It never occurred to him to want anything else. Certainly not money.

"I don't want to leave," he would tell Dr. Crayton. "I like it h(flap)ere. I like you."



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And Dr. Crayton, though he had the ice-locked heart required of a good administrator, was still human enough to feel like a heel. He had to wait until Hisel left his office to plan his next move.

With a planetary immigrant there is always a way.

"Your mother," Dr. Crayton told Hisel, "didn't sign your Martian emigration papers."

"I was forty-two," Hisel said, "when I emigrated. My mother was dead."

"I know," said Dr. Crayton, who hadn't really. "It's a technicality. But it's the sort of thing the League for Pure Blood gets hold of and they'll make a stink about it and cause a lot of unpleasantness for you and the hospital."

"I have," Hisel pointed out, "the purest blood in the county. Martian blood is of necessity sterile of Terran bugs. I have growing in my colon the Martian adapted lichen . . ."

"Of course. You miss the point. What the League for Pure Blood means . . . never mind. The point is that perhaps you'd be happier returning to Mars now instead of waiting until . . ."

"I do not intend to return," Dr. Hisel said. "I am happy here. There is so little real disease on Mars. Mere congenital defects. You have no idea how I rejoiced over my first real appendectomy, knowing it was not a mere synthetic model. Here you have more disease than you can use. For a doctor it is a paradise!"

"Yes, yes. But there's still this legal technicality. There's no getting around it, Hisel. Sorry, old boy."

"How about Whox at Minnesota? I know his mother didn't sign his emigration papers. I was a second generation mutation, but he was one of the few successful flask babies."

"Whox is married to a Terran girl," Dr. Crayton said somewhat hesitantly.

"You are so kind," Hisel said. "I know a hint when I hear one."

Dr. Hisel's courtships were brief. "Will you marry me so that I can become a permanent Terran citizen?" he asked the surgical nurse after a trying operation.

"Qcqvttt!" she said, and left trembling.

On the advice of a sympathetic scrub nurse, who was eight months pregnant, Dr. Hisel tried a more subtle approach.

"It is a lovely night for romance," Dr. Hisel said,



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directing his date's gaze to the starry sky.

"But def!" she giggled. "Look at that moon! It looks like . . . like . . ."

Dr. Hisel slipped his arm around her, as he had been directed. "It looks like a gangrenous gall bladder," he supplied tenderly.

It was the same with one girl after another.

"I am not successful with women," Hisel told Dr. Crayton sadly. "Is there no other way for me to become a permanent citizen?"

"Sorry, old boy."

Still, you know, Hisel not only got to be a full-fledged citizen. He created such a stir that the immigration quota for Martians rose forty per cent and the League for Pure Blood couldn't even find a photographer willing to do their microslides.

It was partly pure chance, as almost everything is, if you think about it.

Hisel, who spent his small amount of leisure time reading the medical columns in the micronews and watching medical events on TV, was, of course, watching Dr. Crayton's televised interratrial septal defect repair from the doctors' lounge. It was one of those things that really looks dramatic, but usually goes pretty easily these days. Ordinarily.

It would have been obvious even to someone not familiar with Martian facial expressions that something was wrong. The massive eyebrows drew together, the cheeks puffed out roundly and then sucked in. The tank-like chest pushed in and out.

"Flap," Dr. Hisel began. "Flap, flap!"

"Hot gall bladder!" the bright-plumed piroquot called from its perch in the corner. "Hemorrhage! Jaundice! Purulence!"

"Flap!"

"Scissors!" said Dr. Crayton.

He began to cut away, ignoring Dr. Hisel who had peeled himself from waist to neck and was using a towel clamp to pull the rest of his current epithelium from his hands.

"Stat," Dr. Crayton barked. "Suture!"

Dr. Crayton turned his head to hear what the anesthetist was whispering in a modulated scream, so that he, but not the television audience would hear.

At this point Dr. Hisel calmly pinched one of the tubes leading to the heart-lung machine, removed the



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end of the tube from the balloon-like affair, made a quick incision at his own carotid and inserted the tube. Then he pinched the other tube and inserted into the jugular on the other side of his neck.

"Pace maker!" Dr. Crayton cried, shouting over his shoulder. "It's a transfusion re . . ." He turned and spotted Hisel, who was grinning like something out of a Medieval Bestiary and breathing on all four lungs.

"You may proceed," he said, "with the operation." He was carefully pushing the polyethylene tubes down into his aorta and vena cava. "Otherwise," he pointed out, referring to his own actions, "the patient would probably have died."

Blood from the heart-lung machine had squirted all down the side of Dr. Crayton's uniform and he was damp across the shirt from his own sweat. "Stat!" he demanded finally, routine coming to his rescue.

"MN reaction," Dr. Crayton explained. "But how did you know before we did?"

"The patient," Dr. Hisel said, "was under anesthetic hypnosis. Apparently he had been told not to talk or move. He could therefore neither voice his discomfort nor manifest his chill by tremor or thrashing of his extremities. In the exigency of the moment, he was able to exert strong-impulse telepathy, no doubt because it was impossible for him to express himself any other way, and I was able to pick up the impulse, amplified by the television. He telepathed one word—'help.' "

"She," Dr. Crayton corrected. "Suture."

If it had been a closed circuit broadcast, Dr. Hisel would have gotten written up in the Journal of the A.M.A., those hospitals, (like Bayside Memorial) not yet testing for rare blood factors would have started to do so, and that would probably have been the end of it.

The general public, however, takes no such pallid approach to dramatic events. There was an immediate demand not for better blood testing or improved anesthetic hypnosis, but for more Martians.

"Your patient," the now eight-and-a-half-month pregnant scrub nurse told Dr. Hisel, "is a very pretty she."

"She is not my patient," Dr. Hisel said. "She is Dr. Crayton's patient."

"But she wants to see you," the scrub nurse said, duck-walking over to the desk to



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switch on an intercom to room 34. "She's not married. Her name is Miss Stancel. And Dr. Hisel, she's *awfully* grateful."

"Ah! I will propose," Dr. Hisel said, ending with a resounding flap!

"Not right away, Doctor. It's so hard to get the idea across to you. The first time, you just talk to her."

Thus began Dr. Hisel's romance and there was about him, the nurses decided, an air of polyethylene, etheric orange blossoms. There was a general softening of the heart concerning Dr. Hisel, even among the nurses in surgery, and Miss Stancel got more service than rich old Mrs. "Three-shift" Carson received.

Miss Stancel (Violet), however, was found in tears on the day of her discharge. The scrub nurse, now on the verge of labor and therefore not allowed in surgery, came prepared to propose in case Dr. Hisel had neglected to do so.

"I told him not to propose right away," she confided to Miss Stancel. "But I happen to know . . ."

"Gloop!" Miss Stancel sobbed from a soft, white throat. "He *did* propose."

"Well?"

It was easy to see what he saw in her. It was a little harder to imagine what she saw in him. But such is the way of Providence.

"He took it back." Miss Stancel carelessly blew her nose on the lace negligee she had just removed.

"But why, for heaven's sake?"

"He said it was unnecessary to get married."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of." The scrub nurse glanced at her watch, beginning to time her pains. "Why is it unnecessary to get married?"

"Because . . . gloop . . . he's *already* been made a permanent Terran citizen."

"Oh, Lord. Look, I'm going into labor. But don't give up. I'll dig into his records when I get out of the delivery room. With a planetary immigrant there is always a way."

**THE END**

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# THE SUMMER VISITORS

*High on the cliff they sat, feared and isolated. . . . Then a little boy climbed up to meet them . . . and found a world opened to him.*

By GORDON R. DICKSON

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

GASPING, and with the pounding of his heart shaking him like an inner hand, Toby Allen clung for a moment to a runty spruce growing directly out from the granite of the cliff face, and looked down. They had not followed. He could see their three upstaring faces some sixty feet below him, etched against the white dust of the dirt road at their feet; and shame pressed through him again like the heat from an electric blanket did when he would be sick in bed with the chills. The oldest Morley brother was no bigger than Toby, though he was a year



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older, at eleven, and Jackie Larsman was even smaller, at ten, Toby's own age. But they were all very tough, and there were three of them.

Toby whimpered a little to himself, as he clung to the spruce. Stand and fight, they always said—his mother and Larry Werner—but they were grown up; and Mother had been a girl and didn't know, and Larry was so wound up in making computers and hanging around Mother, Toby did not believe he even remembered what it was like to be young. Now Toby clung, getting his breath back and looking out over the roofs of the summer resort town and Lake Minnetka. At any rate the two Morleys and Jackie had not come up the cliff after him—and then it occurred to him with a feeble spurt of pride that maybe they were afraid to. It was not easy to climb a cliff like this, even when you were trapped; but Toby's father had climbed mountains when he was alive, and that was one thing Toby could do. He could not fight much, but he could climb.

He looked up now to the top edge of the cliff. He could see nothing beyond it, but he knew the big house was there; the big house with the high wire fence that went all the way down the tangled other side of the hill to the road and back around to the bottom of the cliff. Not even the delivery men were allowed through its gate; and it occurred to Toby, suddenly, that maybe that was another reason the Morleys and Jackie had not followed him. There were all sorts of stories about the big house on the hill.

But the edge was less than thirty feet above him, and he could not go back down. He would tell the people in the house what had happened, and maybe they would send him home in a car, like those people the time he was lost from summer camp and stumbled on their cabin, up in Michigan.

He continued, slowly and carefully up the cliff. It was really not too hard to climb, if you kept your head and tested everything before putting your weight on it. That was what Dad had always said, keep your head and make sure—and take your time. And after a bit he came to the edge of the cliff.

There was a little crack and slope right at the edge. He went up this quite easily and crawled out onto a mat of quack grass, thick from the long months of summer sun.



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The quack grass was always everywhere in late August, and in everybody's lawn.

He lay still for a moment, resting. Then he sat up and looked about him. He was right behind some brown-shingled building with a tile roof, over which the greater height of the big house loomed in hot and heavy contours of white stone. There was a clink of metal from inside the smaller building.

He got up, and very quietly went around the side of the building. He stepped onto lawn, not very well kept, and looked through a small door, ajar; into a dim interior. What he saw appeared to be a garage with several old cars in it. One of them had its hood off, and a big man was bending over it, doing something with the motor.

Hesitantly, Toby approached the man. His tennis shoes made no sound at all on the dark cement of the garage floor and he was almost on the man when the big bulk straightened up, and turned and stared at him.

"Boy!" said the man. "Where did you come from?"

Toby shrunk up before the heavy voice. The big man was truly a giant, with great-muscled arms as thick-looking as redwood posts. Toby recognized him now. He was the handyman up at the big house, who met all the delivery trucks at the gate in the fence and carried the deliveries up himself. There were stories about him, too, and one of the kid versions had it that he would go crazy and break you in two pieces if he got mad.

"I climbed," said Toby, "up the cliff. Please, I had to."

"Climbed?" boomed the big man. His eyebrows went up under the gray curls on his forehead, and he bent down so that his great, heavy jaw hung just a little above Toby's eyes. "What do you mean? Up *our* cliff?"

He sounded as if he was going to be mad, and Toby, not able to take any more, burst into tears. Between sobs, he told the whole story. How Larry Werner had taken his mother out for a drive, because it was Sunday; and there hadn't been anything for Toby to do, so he had just gone for a walk, and the Morleys and Jackie Larsman had chased him—and everything.

"Here, boy," said the big man, after he was done, handing him a wad of clean cotton waste large enough to make a double handful for Toby. "Blow your nose. Don't you



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know nobody's allowed here? But you climbed that cliff?"

Toby nodded, and blew his nose, and wiped his eyes; and told him about how his Dad had climbed mountains.

"By—" began the big man, and then burst into laughter. The whole garage echoed with it. "At this late date! But a hero, a cowardly hero!" And he clapped his huge hands together and laughed again.

"But, come on, boy," he said, when he was done laughing. He took off a sort of mechanic's apron, standing revealed in canvas trousers and a dirty t-shirt. "Father'll have to hear of this."

He led Toby out through the big open doors of the garage at the far end. They emerged onto a terrace, and went down several wide stone steps into a square, sunken garden, very much overgrown with weeds except for a flagstone walk enclosing a shallow, square fish pond in which some large goldfish swam lazily about in murky water among water weeds. Spaced around the flagstone were blocks of white stone like the blocks that made up the big house, looking rather worn as if they had been sat on a lot; and at the far end of the garden was an actual seat of stone, with stone arms, in which sat the fattest and largest old man Toby had ever seen. Striding up and down and muttering to himself by the old man was another man, not quite so fat or old, dressed in some sort of red uniform with rows of medals on it. With two heavy fingers on one of Toby's shoulders, the handyman steered him up in front of the old man in the stone seat.

It was very hot in the garden with the sun beating full upon it and no breeze getting down into it. The old, fat man seemed to be drowsing with his eyes closed. He did not move, even when they came right up in front of him. Toby stood stiffly by the big man.

"Father!" boomed the handyman, and the old man opened his eyes slowly and lazily. First they focused on the handyman, and then they looked down, as if it was a very long way to look, and focused on Toby.

"What's this?" he said. And the handyman told him, the whole story, laughing again as he covered the part about how Toby had come to climb the cliff.

"Mnph!" said Father, and apparently went back to sleep. But the man in the uniform had come close during the telling of the story, and seemed



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to be more than a little excited over it.

"What? What's this?" he barked. "A boy who doesn't like to fight?"

"A boy who climbs cliffs, General," said the handyman, chuckling.

"Cliffs!" snorted the General. "What are cliffs? Combat, now, ah!" and his eyes lit up. "Slash! Bang!" He was carrying some sort of heavy walking stick, and as he said the last two words, he hit out with it at one of the two stone blocks that flanked Father's stone armchair. "That's the stuff!"

"There were three of them," protested Toby.

"What of it, boy?"

"They would have beat me up."

"Hah!" snorted the General. "Beat you, would they? Let them try. Let them try!" And *whack, thwack,* went the walking stick again against the stone block. "Take that! Hah! Hey!—here, boy, you try!"

He handed the stick to Toby. Toby took it rather shyly.

"Well, don't just stand there. Hit it! Hit it! Get in the mood!" barked the General. "What are odds? Surrounded, outnumbered, what of it? Harder, boy, harder!" cried the General; and Toby, who had been whacking the stone block rather diffidently, began to redouble his blows. "That's more like it. Harder! That's more like it. Snort, boy, yell a bit! Get in the mood. That's right—"

Toby was indeed getting in the mood. Under the contagious fever of the General's voice, he saw himself, sword in hand at bay against innumerable foes. He gave himself over to imagining and a red fog of battle danced before his eyes.

"That's it," said the General, when at last Toby had to stop for breath. "Give me the stick back. That's more like it. Not good, yet, but you're on the way. It's not the odds, it's the attitude that counts. Remember that. Nothing like a good battle—" and without a further word to anyone else, he went off, slashing at the weeds and stone blocks, and muttering to himself.

Toby stood where he was, still glowing with the ardor of combat. He came out of it with a start to feel the handyman's heavy fingers on his shoulder.

"Come on, boy," said the handyman, turning, "have to send you home, now."

The handyman took him



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back to the garage and they both climbed into an old panel truck.

"I'll drive you down to the gate," said the handyman. "You can go the rest of the way, yourself."

Toby felt a sudden chill of disappointment reaching through the warmth engendered by the exercise that still seemed to cling to him, more stubbornly than such things usually did.

"Can I come back?" he said, abruptly, without thinking.

The handyman started the motor of the panel truck and backed it out into the sunlight. He turned it's nose down the driveway leading toward the far end and hidden gate.

"Why?" he said, turning and lowering his heavy face until it was close to Toby's.

The bubble of unhappiness that Toby always carried with him these days seemed to swell upward suddenly within him until it burst at his lips.

"I don't have anything to do," he said. "Mother's always having to see lawyers about business and things. It's three years now since Dad died, and she's still always running around settling things. And when she's got a little time, that Larry Werner comes over."

"Who's Larry Werner?" said the handyman, steering the panel truck slowly and carefully down the winding drive past the wild tangle of bush and trees on the unlandscaped part of the estate.

"He's an electronics engineer," Toby scowled and almost kicked the dashboard of the panel truck, but stopped himself in time. "He wants to marry my mother."

"Why not?" said the handyman, chuckling. Toby turned his head to stare at the big man.

"Why, she's *my* mother!" said Toby. The handyman chuckled again. Toby felt hot and strange, as if he should be mad at the handyman for laughing at him, but somehow couldn't quite make it.

"Oh, he's all right, Larry," said Toby. "Why doesn't he go marry somebody else's mother, that's all I want to know?"

"Doesn't want to, maybe," said the handyman, turning his big face to grin down at Toby.

"Well, she's *my* mother," said Toby, again, but not as strongly as he had said it before. He had the most peculiar feeling that he was in the wrong somehow, though he had never felt that way about it before. The panel truck.



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crawling slowly down the drive, had come at last to the level. It rounded a final turn and there was the gate before them. The handyman turned the panel around in a little open space so that it headed back the way it had come, up the drive again, and stopped. Toby opened the door reluctantly, and got out.

"Just lift up the latch and push," said the big man. "Close it after you're out. It'll lock behind you."

"You didn't say if I could come again," protested Toby. The handyman leaned over and down toward him.

"Can you climb that cliff again?" he whispered, with a grin.

"Sure," said Toby, firmly.

"Next Sunday, then. Afternoon." The handyman gave Toby a ponderous wink, then straightened up again, and set the panel in motion. Toby watched him go, then turned to the gate and let himself out.

He headed for home. But as he went down the road toward town, the memory of the General came back to his mind, and he started to glow again, remembering his mock battle with the stone block. Toby's pace quickened, and when he got back down into the streets of the town he turned off from the direct route back to the lakeside cottage he shared with his mother, and went in another direction.

The afternoon sun was lowering over the lake into dinnertime position as Toby finally approached his home, looking somewhat disheveled. Larry's car was in the drive and Larry and his mother were just getting out of it. Toby's mother had that look on her face that she sometimes got after going out with Larry, but it disappeared as she recognized her son.

"Toby!" she cried. "What happened?"

"Nothing," said Toby, nonchalantly. "I had a fight with Kenny Morley, that's all."

"Darling! Are you hurt?" She started to go to him, but Larry Werner caught her hand. He was a tall, lean man with curly black hair and a bony, humorously-ugly face. He grinned down at Toby with a grin something like the handyman's.

"Pretty good," he said. "Who won?"

"He did," said Toby, carelessly. "But it's all right, we're friends now." He turned and began to run into the house. "I'll go get cleaned up for dinner," he called back over his shoulder.

Toby's mother made an-



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other move to go after him, but Larry again held her back. Toby heard his voice fading out behind Toby's back.

"Let him be," Larry said. "He's fine. He hasn't looked that bright-eyed in months, and you know it."

When he climbed the cliff the following Sunday, Toby found the handyman waiting for him in the garage, and polishing one of the old cars. He gave Toby a grin and another of his heavy winks, but continued to polish without saying anything until the paste wax he had spread out on the body of the sedan before him was all brought to a high, slick shine. Then he wiped his hands and turned to Toby.

"Come on, then," he said.

They went out the front of the garage into the sun and down into the sunken garden, which was as still and hot as before. The General was there, pacing up and down, and the great, fat old man in the stone armchair, looking as if he had not moved since Toby's last visit. But there was also a middle-aged but still very beautiful lady pacing back and forth as well.

"Here, Father!" boomed the handyman, bringing Toby up before the fat old man. "Here's the boy come again."

Father lifted his eyelids a little lazily to glance at Toby, and then closed them again, indifferently. Toby heard steps behind him and light fingers in his hair. He turned his head and looked up into the face of the beautiful lady.

"You're a pretty boy," said the lady, slowly. "You'll grow up into something to look at, one of these days."

Her voice was a little too caressing, and Toby was embarrassed by the fingers in his hair, but a certain shyness kept him from pulling away. The lady saw, however, and sighed, and went pacing away across the garden, up the stone steps and in toward the house.

"Well, boy, back again!" snapped the General. "Did you fight, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Toby, eagerly. "I had a fight with Kenny Morley right after I left here."

"Hah!" said the General fiercely and happily. "That's the way. Charge into it. Don't delay. He who hesitates is half-defeated. Carry the fight to them."

"I did," said Toby.

"Good. That's the world, boy. A hard rock for the spineless, but an oyster to be opened by the brave. By your



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deeds will they judge you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Toby.

"Follow courage first, foremost and always. Nothing else compares."

"Nonsense, General!" said a sharp, feminine voice, and they both looked up to see another lady coming down the steps from the house into the garden. She was thinner than the other lady, and while not exactly less beautiful or younger, she had certain air of competence and sharpness about her. She made Toby think of a schoolteacher. "Don't fill the boy's head with notions." She bent her sharp gray eyes on Toby, and at once he felt very small in a way that none of the others had made him feel. "Brute courage is all right for the brutes. Don't class yourself with the brutes, boy."

"N-no—" quavered Toby, wishing he could look away from her piercing eyes.

"Old maid vapors!" grumbled the General, and went stamping off into the house.

"Pay no attention to him," said the lady. "Courage is all very well, but not to be compared to what goes on in your head. Did you ever hear of Archimedes?"

"No," said Toby. He was staring at her, fascinated now. The name she had just said had come ringing out on the still air of the garden like the pure note of a trumpet, though it did not seem that she had raised her voice.

"Archimedes, boy, said—'Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth.' Do you know what he meant by that?"

"No," said Toby.

"He meant," said the lady, "that nothing is so big that knowledge cannot be brought to bear upon it. Man may be small, but the intangible power of his mind, exerted upon the long lever of knowledge, can shift the mighty world or shake the mightier universe. You, boy, could shift the world, little as you are, could turn this Earth from its orbit around the sun if you had the knowledge and the will."

"Me?" said Toby.

"You or any thinking being." The lady looked at him severely. "But the lever of knowledge isn't picked up in an instant, like a sword dropped by somebody else on a battlefield. Everyone has to forge it for himself, length by slow length, so that when he finally comes to use it he has the muscles for its use."

"Could I really move the world?" asked Toby, dazzled.



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"Look around you," said the lady. "The world is being moved in bits and pieces every day by men who were once boys like you. Don't you know anyone who uses knowledge, boy?"

"I guess Larry does," said Toby.

"Larry?" queried the lady, sharply.

"Larry's a friend of my mother's. He's an electronic engineer."

"And how did he get to be an electronics engineer?" said the lady. "Not just by sitting down at a desk and calling himself one, you can be sure."

Toby wriggled embarrassedly.

"Larry can't move the world," he said.

"How do you know?" snapped the lady. "*His* lever of knowledge is far too heavy for *you* to lift. You couldn't even budge it."

"Could if I went to college," muttered Toby.

"College? Hah!" said the lady. "It takes more than college, boy. It takes the will to wisdom; the vision to dream, the hunger to learn, and the determination to put what's learned to use. These are what move the lever. Go to college, indeed! As if that were all!"

"Well, anyway," said Toby. "Larry's not that cool. I know him."

"Do you? Hmph!" sniffed the lady. "I don't think you do. Why don't you ask him, sometime?" And, turning sharply she went back into the house.

Toby, gazing after her, had a sudden wild desire to run and follow, to beg her pardon and ask her more about moving the world. But before he could take a step, he felt the handyman's heavy fingers on his shoulder.

"Time to go, now," said the handyman.

"But I just got here!" cried Toby.

"All the same," said the handyman, and turning Toby about with his fingertips, steered him off.

They took the panel truck down to the gate again.

"Can I come next Sunday? Can I?" pleaded Toby, as the handyman turned the truck around to face back up hill again.

"Well—" the big face looked doubtful.

"Oh, please!" said Toby.

"Well, one more time, maybe," said the handyman. "The summer's almost over. We'll be leaving, soon." And he winked at Toby, and drove off.



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That next week, on Tuesday, Toby got a chance to talk to Larry one evening when Larry was over for dinner and his mother was busy in the kitchen.

"Larry," he said. "Would you like to be able to move the world?"

Larry, who was looking at a magazine he had brought home from the plant, lowered it and looked over at Toby in surprise.

"Sure I would, Toby," he said. "That'd be quite an accomplishment."

"How come you don't try then?" said Toby.

"Well—" said Larry. He put the magazine down on an end table, entirely. And suddenly, for the first time, they found themselves talking . . .

—Later that night Larry talked about it again, but this time with Toby's mother.

"I don't know," he confessed. "I seem to have cracked through, or something. He was all ears."

"Maybe—" said Toby's mother.

"Yes, maybe—" said Larry.

And they both looked at each other.

The next Sunday, Toby did not climb the cliff. He went boldly, instead, to the gate and pressed the button put there for the delivery men to announce their presence to the big house. And then he waited. When nobody came, he reached through the bars of the gate—it was not too hard for anyone with a hand and arm as thin as his—and pressed the latch from the inside.

He pushed the gate open and closed it behind him, and started on foot up the drive. He was almost to the top before he saw the towering form of the handyman coming striding to meet him. Toby ran to meet him; but the big man looked down at him with his heavy face set in lines of sternness, and this time he did not wink.

" I rang, but you didn't come," said Toby.

"Why did you let yourself in, boy?" said the handyman, his deep voice echoing among the tangled plants and bushes on either side of the drive.

"You said I could come," said Toby. He looked up into the big face looming over him. "Nobody else has to climb that old cliff. I don't see why I have to." The handyman merely stood, looking down at him. "What's the matter? Isn't anybody up in the garden?"

The handyman swung around abruptly.



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"Come on," he said. He went back up the drive with giant steps, Toby running to keep up with him.

They took a path around the side of the house, past the open mouth of the garage and went down the steps into the near end of the garden. At the far end, the old, fat man sat as usual in his stone chair, but there were a number of others in the garden, including the General, and the two ladies, but also others Toby had never seen before, men and ladies both. Toby saw the lady he had talked to last time standing talking to the General, and without waiting for anything more, he went up to her.

"Hi," he said.

Both the lady and the General turned to look down at him. Like the handyman, they did not seem particularly pleased to see him.

"Well, here I am again," said Toby.

"I see that," said the lady, sharpy.

"I just thought I'd tell you," said Toby, "I talked to Larry. It's pretty good, that electronics. I guess I'll be an engineer, myself."

"Boy," muttered the General, "Don't forget."

"You mean all that stuff *you* told me?" said Toby, glancing up at him. "No, I won't forget. But I got all that made, now, that courage stuff. And pretty soon I'll have it all made what she told me, after I've been to school and worked some."

"Just like that!" said the lady, ironically.

"Well, that's what you said, wasn't it?" said Toby. He saw all the others in the garden were looking at him now and it made him feel rather larger and more important than he had ever felt up here before. "I know you said it'll be tough. I don't mind. I'm not afraid of work. I'm not afraid of anything."

"Aren't you?" said the lady.

"Heck, no!" said Toby. "Anybody can be afraid. That's nothing. All you got to do is make up your mind and go ahead, and you can do anything." He looked around at them. "That's what I say," he added.

"Boy, boy," said the General, shaking his head.

"Oh, what do you know about it?" said Toby, turning on him. "I bet you haven't even had as much school as I have."

"Mind your manners!" snapped the lady.

"I don't have to!" cried



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Toby, turning on her. "He's not my boss. And you aren't either. I thought you'd be glad to hear how good I'm doing, but you don't even care. He's just a funny old man and you're a funny old maid, and I don't have to pay any attention to either of you . . ."

And he turned away, to run out of the garden and away down the drive, but he never made it.

*"Boy!"* said a voice.

The one word rolled like muted thunder down the length of the garden; and Toby, caught by something that held him like some huge hand capturing a fly, turned about and looked.

He stared across the open space of the fish pond to the fat old man in the stone armchair. But the old man did not look fat and sleepy any longer. His eyes were wide open, looking at Toby, and he loomed, immense and terrifying.

"Come here," said the old man, in the same, awful voice.

Around Toby, all the rest of the people had fallen silent. They stood still as statues, and they seemed to have shrunken in the sound of that voice. Desperately, Toby longed for one of them, the General, the Lady, or even the handyman, to speak up for him, or come forward with him. But none of them moved or made a sound and suddenly Toby realised that in comparison to the old man who sat waiting they were all nothing, and less than nothing; and none of them could help him now.

Slowly, creepingly, against his will, Toby moved down the length of the garden until he stood directly before and below the old man in the stone chair.

"Boy," said the old man, and his voice filled all the air about them, "you are like all the rest. Petty, overweening, ungrateful. Because you dared to climb a cliff, you were accepted here for a moment or two. You have been given courage and a path to wisdom, which are gifts of the gods; and now in your little pride and glory, you think you know it all."

He paused for a moment, and Toby stood still and helpless, as frozen as the stone before him.

"I will give you a third lesson to learn," said the old man, "And that is that you are small and weak, in your own right. And it does not become the small and weak to be selfish and overbearing, to think that they know it all,



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and to expect those that love them, or those that are kind to them, to always cater to their wants and prejudices. Go, boy, and learn humility, and kindness, and what is right!"

And then Toby was free. He turned and went. At first he stumbled. But then he ran. And ran, and ran. And ran.

It was several days before they would let Toby out of bed again. Dr. Alisanti said he had had a touch of sunstroke, and should be kept quiet for a while. And for several days he did not want to go anywhere anyway. All he wanted to do was to stay close and safe in his own bed, in his own house, with his mother to tuck him in under the covers; and Larry to come in now and again, and sit big, and comforting and grownup by his bed while he said comforting things in a voice that was deep and male, but not terrifying as the old man's voice had been.

But on Wednesday they let him get up and about again; and the following Sunday he went once more to the big house on the cliff. The gate was padlocked, now with a heavy chain, but he had not expected it to be open. He went around to the cliff, and —for the last time—he climbed it.

On top of the cliff, all was silent and still. It even smelled deserted. Timidly, he went through the garage and down into the garden. It was empty, as he had known it would be, but now there was something different about it.

The goldfish still swam in the pool, but about the walk surrounding it, the blocks of stone were no longer empty. On each one stood a man or woman, carved in stone. And, as he went down the line, Toby recognized each one of them. They were slimmer and younger than when he had seen them last, and for the most part they had no clothes on, but he recognised the General, and the sharp lady, and even the handyman, leaning on a great stone club on the last block of all.

At the far end of the garden a leaner version of the old man filled the stone seat above the rest. His stone eyes were open, but they looked out over Toby's head at something distant and invisible. For a second, as he stood there, a shiver trembled through Toby, and he reached out a hesitant hand to touch the stone knee, on a level with his nose.

But the touch of the stone



(continued on page 89)

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# The Forgetful Celibate

By E. K. JARVIS

*Don Gangler didn't think one of life's greatest pleasures should hinge on so small a thing as a can opener.*

DON GANGLER fumbled through his pockets as he felt the heat of his wife's eyes blazing into him. He tried his pants pockets, side and rear, then his shirt pocket and all the suit jacket pockets. He emptied out his side pants pocket and pulled them inside out in a final gesture of despair.

Mrs. Gangler was tapping her foot, trying to keep her anxiety to a steady tempo.

"You forgot the tickets?" she asked. She had been prepared to ask that as soon as Don had begun fumbling for the tickets outside of the lobby, but she managed to convey a heroic portion of disbelief and an equal mixture of



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astonishment that one male could be so singularly devoid of standard mental faculties.

"You forgot the tickets?" she repeated, this time getting more of a bite of incredulousness into it.

"Yes, dear, I forgot the tickets." His face took on an expression of resignation. "Well, it probably wasn't such a good show anyhow."

"Try your wallet." Her voice was sharp and snappy. With her growing audience she was feeling the power at her command.

"I did," Don answered silently.

"Try your hatband," said someone in the crowd.

Don reached up quickly and then pulled his hand down. He wasn't wearing a hat. His movements brought about a round of good-natured laughter from the ring of spectators.

His wife glared at him, leaning forward as if ready to bite him. "You'd forget your head if it wasn't tied on to you."

"You certainly have a way with words," Don muttered softly as he shrunk back, as if trying to disappear into the lining of his jacket.

"Oooh," said his wife with disgust and exasperation. She turned on her heel and stalked off. Don started to follow slowly, tapping his pockets in an exploratory manner.

"Now let's see," he mumbled to himself, "where did I put the parking lot ticket."

Don drove home in silence. His wife didn't.

"And how about the time you forgot our invitations to the Hollisters Spring Dance?"

"It's just that I changed my pants. Can't a man change his pants?"

"And how about when you forgot the salad dressing when we had the Baxters over for supper?"

"Everyone forgets salad dressing. I bet that every man in this country over 21 has forgotten salad dressing at least once in his life." He turned in annoyance.

"And how many times have you forgotten to take your shirts from the cleaners when we were supposed to go out and had to run around borrowing shirts for you? And how many times did you forget to put gas in the car and we ran out on back roads shivering and catching cold waiting for someone to give us help? And how about the time we went on a picnic and you forgot the can opener? And how about . . ."

"Everyone forgets salad



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dressing," was all he could mumble.

Don sat in his living room puffing away on his pipe. He heard the sound of his wife's easy, regular breathing coming from the bedroom. He stared out the front window looking, but not really seeing, the row of cars parked outside, the even lawns and the row of front doors that all looked alike.

Yes, it was too true. He was forgetful. He didn't know why. Certainly he didn't want to forget to leave himself open to the abuse leveled at him by his mate. But maybe he was a secret masochist and his unconscious was working solely so he would be granted the opportunity of being chastised and reviled. Some people love to be put upon and punished. Was he one of those? Was his forgetfulness a symptom in a hidden urge to be pushed around?

He took another puff and a curl of smoke seeped into his eye and snapped him back to reality. Did he forget because he didn't really love his wife anymore and this was a psychological weapon he employed without realizing it, to cause her trouble and consternation? Was it his way of getting even? He had been married 11 years and during each year he had become increasingly more forgetful. Maybe there was something to that theory. If it kept up he would be dwindling his life away, falling deeper and deeper into the pit of forgetfulness, gradually being unable to remember his name or where he lived or how to tie his shoes, for that matter. It rankled him more than anything else (his wife excluded) had rankled him for a long time. He took a few more puffs and decided then and there that he would have to do something about it.

Instead of going to the bank the next morning, Don went to the Air Patrol Recruiting Office. He was 34 years old, one under the limit. His eyes were okay and so was his wind. He scored quite well on the intelligence test and aptitude quizzes. Fortunately there was no memory test. When Don left the office he was a member of the Air Patrol. He was so pleased with himself that he forgot about the traffic lights and nearly was run over by a speeding taxi as he crossed over to his car.

"You're what?" said Mrs. Gangler when Don came home that day.



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"That's right," he said, puffing away, looking more smug than he had ever allowed himself to look, "I'm in the Air Patrol."

"What am I going to do?" she asked.

"Join some other branch. I don't care," he said casually.

"I'm going to leave you. I'm not going to wait here and sit around while you go flitting about the moon and stars."

"Not moon and stars. Only satellites. Besides a man like me feels the need of some adventure. I just can't sit here and rot away." He knocked his pipe and tried to look like a professional soldier of fortune.

Mrs. Gangler shook her head. "You're in your second childhood. I should have known when you started forgetting where you parked the car when we went to the movies." She stood up. "If that's the way you want it. As long as the bank accounts are in both our names I'll stick around at least for a while. In fact, it might be wiser for me to do just that if you'll take out a whopping insurance policy on your life. You'll do that, won't you?"

Don sucked on his pipe and looked superior. "If I don't forget."

Three months later Don received his commission as second space lieutenant in the Air Patrol, Rocket Exploration Division. His memory had deserted him quite often in his military career, but then he didn't expect to have it cured in a day. He continually forgot the salutes, the proper way to clean his ray pistol and the call of command when he stood guard nights outside the lonely desert compound. Still, his ability was unquestioned and he scored high marks consistently on the achievement exams.

In one adverse manner his memory gave him satisfaction —he had completely forgotten about Mrs. Gangler.

One bright October morning, Don along with the other officers was summoned to the main field shack. A surprise venture was underway. A new batch of roving asteroids had been discovered containing what appeared to be valuable ores. It was the Rocket Exploration's Division to land on the asteroids and claim them for the country.

"This is a tough mission," said Col. McCoy. "We need 12 officers and 144 men to volunteer. You may expect to encounter strange climatic conditions and rare atmospherical surroundings. It will re-



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quire a long, arduous journey and a lonely, solitary stay once you reach your destinations. Complete survival kits and all other operational gear have been designed and constructed to allow you to feel as much at home as possible. Everyone must be equipped with special Rocket Division appliances for this junket."

He read a long list of necessary items to be carried and asked that the officers make a note of these and secure them immediately upon leaving. There were 28 items in all ranging from G-V nuclear resistant glass shield for their planetary helmets to G-V can openers for the survival and maintenance food and equipment to be used on the asteroids. They were to be worn around the belt at all times.

"Good-bye and good luck," said Col. McCoy when he finished.

The men filed out.

"Lieutenant Gangler."

Don turned around.

It was another lieutenant. "You forgot your hat."

Don smiled weakly and thanked him.

The first couple of days of the flight into the upper reaches went peacefully. Speed was maintained and there had not even been any close calls with the whirling meteors which had caused trouble in the past. They would land on the first of the asteroids in three days if they kept up the present pace. Don was second in command of a group of 20 men. He was in the rear of the ship when the cry of alarm came from the spotter. Before he could react a tremendous force slammed into the ship.

Don fell to his feet and stayed there. The tables and lockers inside the ship went whirling. A gaping hole loomed above him. Several men were sucked through the opening. Others tumbled around like corn being popped and one by one dropped through the hole.

Don shut his eyes and clung to the overhead bar. He squeezed it with hands and arms and shoulders until he cried. Then there was a sudden lurch and a whack. The ship bounced once, twice—then all was still and silent.

For a long moment he hung in his peculiar cramped position. Then forcibly, he pried his hands loose. Finally, he unwound his arms from the pipe and dropped to the floor. He wobbled and fell to his knees, weak and trembling. With the little strength that was left he crawled to the door. It was



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locked. He looked at the gaping hole and dragged his body toward it. A quick appraisal of the ship told him he was the only survivor. He reached the hole and looked out. Dim sunlight hung lightly about the flat land. A moment of panic hit him when he realized he was alone, but then the discipline which had regimented him in the bank and his military training came to his aid. He felt sure and confident.

In a moment the cramps left his body. He struggled to his feet walking hunched over like an ape with a stomach ache.

The supply cabinet was ripped open but Don saw with relief that dozens of cases of cans were still inside, scattered around. He quickly checked his equipment belt which had remained secure around his waist. The emergency equipment belt which circled his middle plus the well-filled supply cabinet gave Don a big surge of hope. He actually smiled when he thought of the peace and calm that would be his, for a while at least. He hoped it wouldn't be too long before somebody spotted him and got him off. But at least he wouldn't have to worry about starving. In addition, he could patch up the hole and he'd be able to stay inside the ship. He had his space gun still in his holster with plenty of bullets in case he was attacked.

He took a cautious walk around the smashed ship. The land was deserted. Don assumed it to be an uncharted asteroid. Maybe when he got back he could name it Gangler Shelf or Ganglerville or something. The ground was firm but seemed to be bubbling slightly with warm water. The temperature was ideal, Don noted with relief. That would be something he might not be able to deal with so effectively if the temperature was too hot or too frigid for him.

Satisfied that he was alone on the asteroid he went inside the ship and opened the supply cabinet. He ripped open the first box and took out a small, cylindrical can.

*This can contains peas, ready-cooked. They may be eaten immediately after the can is opened. The can may be opened* only *by a G-V-3 single-hole opener.*

Don reached into his belt and found the G-V-3 single-hole opener. A minute later he was enjoying some well-cooked peas.

He dug down farther into



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another case and came up with beans. The can bore the same instructions except that opener G-V-4 two-ply lined would open it as it was of different size and construction.

A little more digging and Don found steaks and still later, milk.

Another search disclosed apple pie which could only be opened by G-V-3 Slitter. The pie was just like Mother Cabelli's bakery used to make back home in Templeton, Don decided.

When he was done eating, he went to his bunk and went to sleep. It wasn't a bad existence after all. No disturbances, no nagging wife . . . the thought brought him back to Templeton for a moment. He didn't miss her one bit. But the thought came to him, though, that at least she was a woman and that was more than he had at the present. Well, he shrugged, you can't have everything.

"I should be happy I'm alive," he said, turning over and dozing off.

The days went on. Six, seven, eight. The supply was good for a while yet. The radio equipment was beyond repair even had Don known how to go about fixing it. The more he began getting acclimated to his surroundings the more he thought of his loneliness and how damn nice it would be to have a companion, a female companion. Col. McCoy was right it would be a lonely, solitary stay. That night he dreamed that a reigning movie queen visited him. He woke up with a very real feeling of disappointment. That day was spent eating and grumbling and wishing. The time dragged on.

In an effort to alleviate the pressure of solitude which had begun to bear down on him, Don dug deeper into the supply cabinet, hoping to come up with an exotic dish which might heighten his appetite and divert his thoughts from dwelling so heavily on women. He found asparagus, beets and cabbages, which hardly can be called fit substitutes for a mental image of a lady. Then his hand came in contact with an unusual object. It wasn't cylindrical like the others, it was . . .

Don whipped the can out and read the label. His eyes moved swiftly.

*This can may be opened only when a division or part thereof is stranded on a strange world for a period of more than a month. It contains equivalent of one hour's*



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*intimate companionship with a desirable female.*
*Ingredients—Top secret.*
*Ration—One per man.*
*Instructions—May be opened only with a G-V-34 Driver.*

Don put down the can easily, almost daintily, so he wouldn't injure it. Then he let out the loudest yell he had ever let out. Women! Women! He checked the supply cabinet case. There were 64 cans of women. And all his! He hurriedly dug into his emergency equipment belt. He pulled out the G-V-30 Driver by mistake. In his eagerness he tried it on the can. It didn't work. That was to be expected. He searched for the G-V-34 Driver. Then his fingers began to fumble frantically and a blanket of apprehension came over him.

One by one he flung the tools on the ground, with each clank of metal, his alarm increasing. Then they were all on the ground. Don stared at them. Then he started crying. He sobbed bitterly.

"I forgot it. I FORGOT IT."

He leaped to his feet and picked up the can and began hammering at it. The tools made only slight dents in the steel surface of the can. Don threw it on the floor and stamped up and down on it viciously. Then he kicked it savagely. It shot through the hole and outside. Don scrambled after it. He caught up with it and kicked it again. He chased it and screamed, kicking it and shouting at the top of his lungs, racing and lunging like a maddened soccer player, cursing and stumbling and crying as he kicked the can across the lonely, flatlands of a lost world.

**THE END**

(cont. from page 81)

reassured him. It was only rock; and, suddenly, a feeling of joy and freedom burst up within him. He felt light and loose, like a prisoner given his liberty again; and he turned happily away.

Larry and his mother were getting out of the car after their Sunday drive, as he got home. He ran across the lawn to them, pellmell, and flung his arms around both of them, hugging them.

"Oh boy!" he cried. "Oh, boy! You're back!"

"Well!" said Larry, patting Toby fondly on his back. And Larry and his mother looked across at each other over Toby's head, smiling at each other like people who have come safe to harbor, together and united, at last.

**THE END**



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# WHEN HE AWAKENS

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ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

*An unusual story about an unusual hero —and an even more unusual villain.*

THE four eggs disappeared first, yolks unbroken. Then the eight slices of prime bacon. The hot, steaming mush, covered with brown sugar, went next. On top of this, a gigantic wedge of crumbly cornbread adorned with nobs of salty butter. Lubrication for the process came by way of a huge mug of bitter coffee that was as equally black as the hand that lifted it. Carver Jefferson ate big like he was and was proud like he ate. Big!

Carver, thirty-one generations removed from the jungles of Africa, pushed himself away from the table and wiped his ample lips on his blue denim sleeve. He glanced, half-smiling, at the empty dishes before him. He never ceased to marvel at Becca's cooking, even after seventeen years of marriage.

"Mighty fine, Becca, mighty fine," he said. His deep voice filled the prefab like a tuba's roar. He rose and stretched, wringing the dregs of sleep from his body. The powerful muscles of his arms and back knotted and rippled beneath his shirt. He was a man devoted to the soil and the growing of things, a farmer, and he had work to do. Even if the soil was alien to his birthplace.

After all, he had buried his only child in it.

Carver watched Becca working over the stove. He felt a surge of desire course from the pit of his stomach and squelched it. During all the seventeen years, her sturdy arms and curving



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loins had never lost their attraction for him. Daytime was meant for a man's work, he reminded himself. Pleasure, to heighten the day's end. It was good that they pleasured each other for there would be no more babies. The loss of Thad saddened him and made him hate the creature that had caused his death. The Spindly.

He walked slowly to the box by the stove and stared at its occupant. The tiny pig stared beadily back at him for a second and then leaped at the side of its box. He knelt and scooped it into his arms. He held it to his cheek and cooed meaningless phrases to comfort it.

Becca half-turned from her work and watched him. Her dusky beauty seemed out of place in the prefab. The corners of her well-shaped mouth turned upward as Carver replaced the pig in its box. It was not the first time he had made a pet of a little runt. It was Carver's nature to pity helpless creatures.

"That little pig is about the proper size for roasting," she remarked casually. Becca, a graduate sociologist, was proud of her egotistical, uneducated, man. Primarily because he was able to make her feel like a woman.

"You hush that kinda talk, woman." Carver moved protectively in front of the wriggling little pig. This sort of banter helped them both forget Thad's death. "Me and little pig here are disgusted by your mean nature."

Becca turned back to her stove, still smiling. "When that pig is full grown, he'll weigh at least five-hundred pounds," she said. "I will not have a five-hundred-pound pig living in my kitchen."

"Aw Becca, I only keeping this pig in here till he's strong enough to get his share of the slops." Carver walked to the stove and embraced Becca from behind. She snuggled against him for a second and then dug her elbow into his ribs.

"Fine farmer you are. Work to be done and you prefer to spend your time getting in my way." She placed her small hand against his chest and propelled him toward the door.

Carver pulled open the door and inhaled deeply. In the five years since they had come to Delta IV, he had learned to relish its tangy atmosphere. It was different from that of Earth, but the difference was enjoyable. He admired the solid acre of purple Samash



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stalks that were the reason he had been sent here. There had been less than forty of the plants when, by request of the Federation Science Council, he arrived five years ago. Now there were thousands.

Carver knew why the Samash fruit were important to every human in the galaxy—they prolonged life as much as two hundred years—but he did not comprehend the fact that, in a refined state, the fruit acted on the body at a cellular level and prevented age from destroying a cell's ability to reproduce. Of course death remained the inevitable reward of the living, but it came much later and without the internal and external withering.

Carver started out the door and stopped suddenly. He searched intently for the flash of green he thought he had seen among the stalks on the far left edge of the acre. His gaze traversed the prefab's front yard, ignored the livestock's quarters thirty yards to the right, traveled along the rutted dirt road that bordered the acre of Samash stalks, and flickered among the most distant ones. There it is again, he thought. The Spindly is at the stalks again!

Carver bolted back inside the prefab, his face an angry mask. "Where's my shotgun?" he bellowed. He bounded to the table, knocking over a chair in his haste. "Gonna put up some pegs for that blasted gun," he mumbled. He spotted it leaning in the corner by the pig's box and rushed to it. Pausing for a second by the desk, which he never used, he rummaged in its top drawer for some shells. He shoved a handfull in his pants pocket and sprinted out the door. "Spindly's at the stalks again," he yelled back to Becca. She shook her head slowly, the smile gone from her intelligent brown eyes.

Becca walked slowly to the window that looked out toward the acre. She watched as Carver's big figure grew smaller in the distance, all hunched over like a preying cat. She sighed deeply and sat down at the table to wait for the sound of the gun.

To Becca and Carver Jefferson, the Spindly represented the biggest problem they had encountered on Delta IV. They had never been close enough to it to see any more than its slim green outline. It showed few signs of intelligence. It seemed only to be interested in the purple Samash stalks. It was a biped creature that stood about four



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feet tall. And it was existing on a planet where, according to the survey crews, there *was* no such animal.

At least once a week, Carver would find several stalks uprooted and missing. He sometimes surprised the Spindly in the act. There was always much bellowing and, if he had his shotgun, much ineffective volleying. It had been sort of a half-hearted affair until the Spindly had killed Carver's only child, Thad.

The boy had been big for fifteen. He already had his father's powerful body and his mother's fine features. He had supplemented his lack of companions with a great love of hunting. Becca had often watched father and son tramp away to spend the day in search of excitement. And soon Thad started to go alone.

One day, just seven months ago, after a sortie by the Spindly into the stalks, Thad had announced he would hunt the pest down. He had taken his father's high-powered rifle and a lunch Becca prepared for him and marched, boyishly important, down the road. Neither Carver nor Becca had ever seen him alive again.

Carver had found his badly crushed corpse at the base of one of the granite cliffs. Somehow Thad had managed to lever a huge boulder off the lower part of his body, but he had been long in dying. Carver had later spoken proudly of how his son had even splinted both his legs before he died. But Becca, who loved Carver, had seen the heartbreak in his soft brown eyes.

Each Sunday, as the two of them stood over the simple grave, Becca saw a little more of the goodness die in Carver, only to be replaced by increased hatred. He was a simple man, an extremely proud man, and the hate was killing him. He even kept the smashed rifle, with its blood-stained stock, in their bedroom. "A memory piece," he called it.

The distant boom of the shotgun startled Becca. She rested her head in her arms and cried softly. As Carver's footsteps approached the door, she dried her eyes on her apron and hurried to the sinkfull of dirty dishes.

Carver was smiling as he entered and replaced the shotgun by the pig's box. He dropped the shells into the desk drawer and stopped by the doorway. "I think I hit it that time," he announced.



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"You think?"

Carver frowned at Becca's trim backside. "I was close enough to see it got a face. I come through the stalks just as it was pulling up one and I saw it got two eyes, one nose, and a mouth. I give it both barrels and it jump up in the air, and come down running." Carver smiled as he thought of how the Spindly had limped. "It was limping too," he added.

Becca suddenly whirled from the sink and Carver never remembered seeing her so angry. "So you hurt it," she snapped. "Is that going to make me forget Thad? Is it worth three or four stalks to me to take a chance on losing you too?"

"But it's a varmint."

"You say it's a varmint."

"It root up my stalks don't it?"

"Your stalks." Becca's voice held a note of surprise. "Nobody knows whose stalks they are. They didn't grow on this planet naturally." Becca was gesturing at the wall in the general direction of the acre. "Suppose those stalks belong to the Spindly? That makes you the varmint."

Carver Jefferson loved his wife devotedly; but he was a proud man and master in his house. "Enough talk, woman," he said coldly. "Seven years ago a survey ship found these here stalks. The brains mess around with em and find out they can't grow em no place *but* here. So what do those brains do? You're right. They hire the best damn farmer they can find, me. They tell me to grow these stalks. They take some stalks and soil of their own and they leave this place and they ain't coming back for maybe ten years. They're gonna mess till they find a way to grow stalks everywhere. But they trust Carver Jefferson to keep these stalks growing."

Carver started out the door and then swung back in. "And no skinny little green beast gonna eat what I work hard to grow. Especially when it kill my boy. One of these days I'm gonna eat *it* for supper!" Carver slammed the door loudly to emphasize his point.

It was early afternoon before Carver finished replanting the stalks torn up by the Spindly. He wiped his glistening forehead on his sleeve and sat down on the outermost of the furrows. The stalks would root again unless the green biped returned. And Carver knew it would. He made up his mind to think of a way to kill it. He decided he'd sit



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right where he was until he did. He was a long time sitting.

He had tried waiting for the Spindly before. He remembered the three days, just after he'd buried Thad, he'd spent concealed in a hole. The Spindly had stayed away, but the first night he slept in his own bed, seven stalks had been uprooted. Carver had then tried scattering poisoned bits of meat. The meat laid on the ground till it rotted.

Carver wondered if the Spindly could possibly be lazy. He decided it was worth a try. He uprooted four of the stalks he had just replaced and laid them by the outside furrow. He hurried homeward after his shovel.

He dug the pit narrow but deep. The canvas tarp covered it neatly and with a thin blanket of soil on top of the tarp, the job was almost complete. It was nearly invisible in the sunlight and at night it would be. Carver laid the four stalks gently on the thin layer of dirt. If the Spindly was lazy he would prefer the loose stalks to those not yet uprooted. Carver shouldered his shovel and took a last look at his handiwork. The little green beast could jump itself silly, he decided. It would never get out.

The following morning, Carver rose with the sun. When Becca entered the kitchen, she found him pacing nervously. The coffee was simmering over a low fire and Carver carried his huge mug as he paced. She poured herself a cup and, seated at the table, she watched him curiously.

"What in the world is wrong, Carver?" She glanced at the shotgun leaning by the door.

"Maybe I got a surprise for you."

"Surprise?"

"I set me a trap, Becca. Dug a big hole and hid it so the Spindly would fall in it." Carver felt his excitement growing strong in his stomach. He glanced out the window and decided they needn't wait any longer. "Come on. You and me gonna see what we caught." He almost forgot to take along his shotgun and had to go back inside to get it.

The four stalks he'd placed so carefully were gone. Three more had been torn from the outside furrow. Carver's cheeks puffed with exasperation. The tarp was gone too. He examined the edges of the pit and discovered the exact spot where the Spindly had lain on its belly to snatch first



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the stalks and then the tarp from the hole that was going to have it jumping itself silly. "I'll think of something better," Carver mumbled testily.

"What?"

"I said I'll think of something better."

Becca was silent for a moment, staring into Carver's eyes. Then she grabbed his arm tightly. "Forget the Spindly, please Carver?"

"Are you crazy, woman?"

"Not crazy, just frightened."

"First that green varmint kill my boy and now it got my wife scared." Anger and hatred spread over Carver's blunt negroid features. Ignoring his wife, he turned toward the nearby foothills, his great fists clenched. "You listen, Spindly," he yelled hoarsely, remembering his son's crushed body. "I'm gonna kill you." His challenge, carried by the gentle wind, reverberated among the hills and, muted somewhat by their growth of small trees, echoed back.

Becca's features were set in hard lines as she stared up at her husband's stormy eyes. Carver glanced down and fumbled for her hand. She jerked away from him. "You pay no attention to what I want," she accused.

"Aw, now Becca." Carver tried to encircle Becca's waist with one brawny arm. She slapped it away. Carver was surprised to find himself standing alone beside the pit. Becca had bolted from his side. She was stumbling away from him, down the dirt road, toward the house. He knew she was crying. He glanced quickly at the empty hole in the rich black earth and felt the angry hatred well within him once again—*Strong.*

"Hey! Wait up, Becca," Carver yelled. He broke into a loping run. His gigantic strides quickly closed the distance between them. He caught Becca's arm and pulled her up short. "I'm gonna think of something better to catch the Spindly." Carver read the fear on Becca's face.

Becca shook her head wildly for a second. "Suppose the Spindly thinks of something first?" She struggled to free herself. "You don't consider that," she sobbed.

For the first time in his life, Carver lost all patience with Becca. As her struggles became increasingly stronger, his anger grew. Suddenly he could endure her sobbing no longer. He shoved her violently and she tumbled to the ground. He stepped over her



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and strode toward the distant prefab. He paused as he reached the front door and glanced back down the road. Becca still lay huddled where she had fallen. Carver felt a momentary stab of remorse and shrugged it off. A woman shouldn't tell her husband what to do, he told himself. She could apologize to him, he decided. He went inside to think. Gradually he formulated another plan.

Becca maintained an icy silence during their evening meal. The silence and the fact that the meal, itself, was not well prepared only served to heighten Carver's determination. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve, glared at her, and clumped out the door. He headed straight for the small room, off the livestock quarters, which housed his forge and anvil.

The forge room had been included in the outbuildings only because Carver had insisted on it. The powers-that-be had finally agreed that a man should be allowed to pursue his hobby. And the forging of metal gave Carver pleasure. He enjoyed seeing his great strength transmitted into tangible form as he listened to the ring of his hammer on steel. Only now he was creating in the image of his hatred for the Spindly.

Carver heated, hammered, and quenched the leaves of spring-steel. The cart would ride rougher on its depleted suspension, but he needed *good* steel. Carver preferred to work using only the light thrown off by the forge. Its fiery glow bathed his perspiring face and faded before it reached the walls of the room. It caressed his muscular torso and highlighted his hatred. He punctuated his angry monologue with the clang of his hammer.

"Woman don't get her way, fix everything a man don't like for supper." He quenched the piece of metal he was working on and dropped it into a pile of other finished pieces. He began work on another. "The brains tell Carver Jefferson he don't need traps for varmints 'cause there ain't no varmints where he's going. Soon as he gets there a green one starts pulling up his crops." Carver quenched the final piece and placed them all on his workbench. "Gonna build some traps," he mumbled to himself. "And build a cage so's the brains can see for themselves." He began fitting the pieces together.

The next morning, Carver



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set his four simple under-spring traps in a perimeter guarding the corner of the acre the Spindly seemed to favor. He concealed them beneath scattered leaves and dirt. Then he returned home to construct the cage.

On the morning of the following day, he found them undisturbed. He maintained his usual work routine and made an effort to apologize to Becca. She ignored him and he retreated to the forge room to brood.

With dawn of the third day, Carver stepped out the door of the prefab and put his left foot into the jaws of one of his own traps! Only his heavy boot saved him from a broken ankle. As the first wave of pain struck, he yelled for Becca.

With Carver seated in a kitchen chair and the boot cut off his foot, they stared at his swollen ankle. "Wiggle your toes," Becca ordered.

Carver complied and said, "They wiggle okay." He flexed his ankle and tried to rise.

Becca pushed him gently back into the chair. "That ankle is in no condition to walk on."

"It gotta be," Carver said. He brushed her hand gently aside and rose. He limped painfully around the kitchen, putting more weight on the ankle with each step. "Don't you see, Becca?" he asked through clenched teeth. "The Spindly is smarter than I thought. It find that trap and set it for me. Coulda been you that got caught."

Carver limped into the bedroom and returned with a fresh pair of stockings and some low-topped shoes. "Maybe it even hid the other traps around here." Carver pulled off his right boot and stocking. He winced as he eased the fresh sock over his swollen ankle and then, very gingerly, he laced up the low-top. Yanking on the other stocking, he continued to explain. "Spindly live somewhere near the place I found Thad. There's lots of caves up there and it probably living in one."

Carver rose and retrieved his shotgun from the corner. Stuffing a fistfull of shells in his pocket, he started for the door and then stopped suddenly. "If something happens and I don't come back tonight, don't go looking for me. If I'm not back by tomorrow night, you know how to turn on the emergency beacon. Ship'll come in three or four days."

"Carver, please?"



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"Probably be back tonight." Carver left before she could begin to plead with him. He felt she would be safe in the prefab until he returned.

Carver struck off through the calf-high grass after first checking on the other three traps. They were undisturbed.

Beyond the acre, the planet was unchanged from its original state. Carver's pace was rapid through the grass which covered the ground until it began to rise into rolling foothills. Insects buzzed away from his feet in clouds, their bodies producing a riot of color. His ankle, which had been painful at first, was much less so now.

Carver loaded the shotgun when he reached the beginnings of the stunted forest that covered the foothills. He became more cautious the closer he came to the spot where he had found Thad's body. The boy had been lying at the base of the first of the granite cliffs. The cliffs rose dully from the heavily vegetated foothills, like eroded church spires. They were surrounded by jagged stone slabs that had crashed down their sides. The place reminded Carver of a graveyard. He felt a shiver run up the back of his neck as he stared at the boulder that had crushed his son. His son had died right where he now stood. And the Spindly had killed him.

The rock struck Carver a glancing blow on the shoulder. He looked upward at the towering cliff and then threw himself toward its base. The gravel came first like a pelting hailstorm. The sound grew to an unbearable thunder as huge chunks of granite, multi-sized stones, and tons of choking dust poured down. The seconds passed like so many hours for Carver as he huddled beneath a small outcropping of rock, expecting any minute to be crushed. For the first time in days, no thought of the Spindly crossed his mind. He was far too frightened.

Carver waited until the dust settled before he left the shelter of the outcropping. Then he left at a limping sprint. When he felt he was safe from another avalanche, he stopped and searched the cliff for the Spindly. Then with a start he remembered the shotgun. He tried to remember where and when he had dropped it. When the first rock had hit him, or perhaps while he crouched by the cliff? No memory of losing it came to him. He considered exposing himself to another ava-



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lanche and decided against it. He picked up two good-sized throwing stones and started deeper into the maze of gullies and cliffs. He was careful to keep to the center of the gullies. An hour later, he found the first of the discarded Samash stalks.

Becca stared at Carver's filthy clothes and dusty face for a full minute before she spoke. "I was afraid you'd been killed." She was sitting at the kitchen table and Carver could smell food. His stomach tightened into a knot reminding him he hadn't eaten since breakfast. He closed the door against the chill night air.

"You been cooking?" he asked.

"Sit down. I'll fix you a plate," Becca said.

Between huge mouthfulls of beef stew, his favorite, Carver explained how the avalanche had almost buried him and had caused him to lose the shotgun. He told her about continuing into the cliffs and discovering the withered stalks which had obviously been dropped by the Spindly. At first, he said, he had suspected a trap. The fact that the stalks were in differing stages of decay and none too numerous had caused him to rule out the trap angle. He waited until he finished eating before mentioning the cave.

He wiped his mouth on his sleeve and pushed his chair back from the table. "I found where it live, Becca," he announced proudly. "It living in a cave by the chimny-rock where we dug the stone for the fireplace. The fireplace had been a family project. Becca, Thad, and Carver had spent three days loading rainbow colored chunks of rock on the cart and hauling them home. They had spent many a wintry evening sharing the warmth of their labor. Carver knew Becca remembered the chimney-rock.

"Where from the chimney-rock?" she asked.

"About fifty yards up the ravine. You remember where those four trees are, don't you?"

"Yes."

"To the left of the trees. I snuk up and listened at the mouth of the cave. I could hear it moving around and breathing. I didn't want to take any chances so I piled a bunch of rocks in front of the cave and sealed it up. Gonna take me some dynamite sticks tomorrow and blow that Spindly to bits."

"Suppose its able to dig its



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way out and is waiting for you?"

"Those rocks too big for it," Carver said, shaking his head. "Almost too big for me to move." He rose from the table and caught Becca's arm. "You coming to bed with me, woman?"

"Oh, yes, Carver." Becca flung herself at him and buried her head against his chest. "I was so frightened," she said. "If anything happened to you I wouldn't want to live. I'd kill myself, Carver."

Arm in arm, they started for the bedroom. Carver thought of something he had omitted. "One funny thing, Becca," he said. "The Spindly been trying to grow stalks. It had a bunch of them planted in front of the cave, but they was all dried up and dead." Carver failed to notice that Becca's eyes widened and then narrowed in a puzzled frown. He was too excited about tomorrow's plan.

Becca was gone when Carver awoke the next morning. At first he lay in bed listening for the familiar sounds of breakfast being prepared. The absolute silence sent him into the kitchen with her name on his lips. Not finding her there, he ran out the door into the yard in his underwear. She was gone!

Carver stood shivering in the morning stillness. He glanced wildly about and then hurried into the house. He found the note as he was sitting at the table tying his shoes. It was in Becca's handwriting.

*Dear Carver:*

*No unintelligent creature would attempt to cultivate. We are dealing with something man has never encountered before. If, along with its desire to grow things, it wishes to kill, then I would rather it kill me. You made me very happy last night, Carver.*

*I love you,*
*Becca*

Carver crumpled the paper in his fist and threw it against the wall. It had been a long time since Carver Jefferson prayed, but his lips moved silently as he sprinted out the door. God forbid that Becca would find a way to remove the barricade from the front of the cave.

When Carver reached chimney-rock, he could see that the cave's mouth was clear. His breath was coming in great sobs, burning into his lungs like fire. He shouted Becca's name and the gully echoed



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with the sound of his voice. He stumbled and almost fell. With another bellow of rage, he breasted the four trees and disappeared into the inky black hole.

The eerie purplish glow stopped Carver short. He heard only his own labored breathing. He turned to see what had brushed against his face as he entered and found that a heavy black curtain had been hung across the opening. The glow seemed to come from every square inch of the cave at once. At first, he could make out very little.

"Becca." His voice was little more than a dry croak. He peered about and then what he was seeing began to register. On his left was a mound of plastic crates and boxes. Some were open. Many more were not. At the rear of the cave stood a small couch. Carver couldn't help thinking that it was just the size for a Spindly. But it was *machine* made. He pressed his hand into its soft padding. It was, he decided, very much like the acceleration couches on shipboard.

Carver retreated slowly to the curtained opening. His jaw fell as he noticed the tiers of books. Higher than his head, they stretched across the right wall. And there were strange pieces of machinery on the floor, with tendrils of insulated wire protruding aimlessly from their backs. The Spindly *was* intelligent. Carver's mind accepted the fact. And now it had Becca.

Carver emerged from the cave into the bright sunlight. Blinking against the unaccustomed glare, he tried to imagine where the Spindly would take Becca. It wouldn't, he decided, move deeper into the cliff area without its belongings. If it had weapons, it would have used them long ago. Carver ruled out the factor of it attempting personal combat. An avalanche yes, but it was far too small to rely on physical strength. Where would it go? The answer hit him like a giant fist, right in the pit of the stomach. The Spindly would head for the prefab!

Carver errupted into motion. The gully echoed with the clatter of loose stones. Carver cursed himself as he ran. Of course the Spindly would try for the prefab. Once there it would take what it wanted, kill Becca, and destroy what was left. In doing so it would even the odds a great deal. Carver offered his silent prayer again as he



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passed the spot where Thad had been killed. In the middle of it, one of Becca's sayings came into his mind. "If you don't pray while its sunny, why pray when it rains?"

Carver felt relief spread through his tired body as he emerged from the stunted forest into the grass. The acre of Samash was swaying in the soft breeze and at this distance he could see no signs of damage to the prefab. He put his head down and tried to force every last bit of speed from his knotted muscles. If something happened to Becca, he knew he could never forgive himself. She had begged him to stay away from the Spindly.

The grass seemed to clutch at his legs as he ran. He was able to increase his speed the instant he reached the road. The closer he came to the prefab, the more blurred his vision became. Perspiration was streaming into his eyes. His legs threatened to cramp into unyielding knots with each step. He tried to ignore the flashes of pain that ran across his hips down into his calves. He stumbled across the yard and threw himelf at the closed door. It opened instantly beneath his weight, sending him sprawling into the kitchen.

Carver's momentum carried him almost to the kitchen table. He swallowed the sour fluid that was bubbling convulsively in the back of his throat and tried to gather his legs beneath him. His groping hands caught the edge of the table. He pulled himself erect and found himself staring into Becca's face. She was seated across the table from him.

"You all right?" he croaked.

"Tired, but all right."

"The Spindly . . . I thought it . . .?"

"He, Carver."

"What?"

"The Spindly is a he."

"Spindly a he?" Carver shook his head groggily. Then he remembered the strange machines in the cave. "Set the beacon. I saw the inside of the cave. We got to kill it. Ship'll bring guns."

"His name is Istal, Carver. I dressed his foot where you shot him."

Carver eased his tired body into a chair and tried to make sense of what Becca was saying. Everything was becoming so complicated.

"Istal is only a child, Carver. He has a mechanical translator that allowed us to communicate. His parents were killed when their starship crashed and burned in the middle of what is now your



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acre. He . . . he thought I was going to kill him." Becca stretched her hands across the table and grasped Carver's arm. He could feel her trembling.

Then Carver realized she was pleading with him to let the Spindly live. "He killed my boy, Becca. The rest I could forget, but not my boy." Noticing the open door was a knife in the heart for Carver. The door was open. The door they pretended did not exist, the door they had not mentioned since Thad's death, was open. Carver rose cautiously. "You opened Thad's door?"

"Carver, listen to me. The Samash and the elements which make it grow were the cargo Istal's parents carried. He needed it to live. He's even younger than Thad was, but he tried to grow his own."

"He killed my boy," Carver muttered.

"Do you think a fifteen-year-old boy could move a ton of rock off his legs when they were crushed?" Becca asked. "And if he did, is it possible that he could splint his leg? Don't you see, Carver? Istal did all that." Becca's words rebounded inside Carver's skull. "He was with Thad when he died, Carver. Thad told him things about us he would only tell a friend. Our boy was not alone when he died." Becca hesitated for a moment. "I want you to let Istal take Thad's place in our house."

Carver faced the bedroom door squarely. He pushed it open and stepped inside. His fists, clenched into tight balls, slowly relaxed. The sunlight fell in a golden shaft across the bed. Its occupant seemed even smaller to Carver at this distance. A miniature green face, features finely cut, nestled against the white sheets. One small hand hung over the edge of the bed. As Carver watched, the Spindly, Istal, rolled on his stomach and with a contented sigh burrowed deeper beneath the covers.

Carver swallowed the uncomfortable lump in his throat and backed out, closing the door gently behind him. He saw the two huge tears standing on Becca's cheeks and the lump returned. With a great deal of effort, he forced the gruffness back into his voice. "Gonna be pretty hard," he rasped. "But I guess a big black man like me can get used to a little green boy like that."

It was not the first time Carver Jefferson had made a pet of a little runt. **THE END**



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(Continued from page 17)

funny-looking—lumpy, sort of —but otherwise just like a man. Seemed to be dressed in a sort of corduroy coverall, and alligator boots—or that's what they looked like, anyhow —and that's about it. Eyes were blue, I think. His complexion was terrible. It looked like a *Before* ad for a face cream."

"That's all?" Marsha complained. "Nothing unusual?"

"Not if you consider a height of two hundred feet usual."

"Oh," she pouted, "you know what I mean. No tentacles, or extra eyes, or anything like that?"

Harry frowned. "There *was* one thing . . . His eyes— They were lustreless. You know, no glistening from moisture. Just big whites, and blue irises, and dark pupils. Come to think of it, they reminded me of fly's eyes; you know what I mean? Faceted, sort of. Otherwise, though, he looked about like anyone else. Excepting the size, of course."

"Do you really think they'll evacuate the city?" she went on, ignoring the tired look in her husband's eyes. Marsha was a good wife, and her husband's health was of importance to her, but she was a woman first, and her curiosity got the better of her solicitude.

"Of course not," Harry groaned. "I wish you wouldn't listen to rumors, Mar. What would be the point? The idiots who advocate evacuation followed by atomic bombing are not taking into consideration the fact that he said *others* are coming. Not to mention his claim to immunity."

"I don't see—if things are so inevitable—why you have to keep going back to stand guard," Marsha said.

Harry shrugged. "Probably won't have to, after a while. The way things stand, it's either destroy him, or give in. In either case, the guard would be disbanded. I give it another week, at most. Right now I'd like to sleep."

"I wonder why he came to New York," Marsha pondered. "Why not Washington?"

"Strategy, honey. Damned fine strategy, too. See, if it became necessary to actually drop a bomb on him, we could always get along without the capital; but our economy would dissolve in minutes if we lost Wall Street."

"You're being cynical," she accused.

"A little," he chuckled. "But he *is* in a safe locale, economically speaking. *Now* may I go to sleep?"



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"Wait, let me see if I have any more questions."

Harry waited patiently while Marsha screwed up her face and thought hard. "Nope," she said finally. "No more."

"Good," said Harry. "Then *I* have one: How'd the game come out yesterday? I left before the end, and it was a tie score."

Marsha smiled in embarrassed apology. "Aw, Harry, you know I don't follow football. I—I turned the set off as soon as you left."

"Oh, fine," he groaned. "And I didn't buy a paper today, either. Damn it all . . . Hey!" He sat up straight on the couch. "Maybe it'll be on the afternoon newscast, huh?"

Without awaiting an answer, Harry crossed to the TV and turned it on. "What time is it, Mar?"

"About twenty-five to five," she said.

"Swell!" Harry exulted, snapping on the set. "I can catch the pro football review on CBS. Five minutes late, but I should catch the scores, anyways . . ."

The picture formed on the tube, and Harry crouched before the set to watch newsreels of yesterday's game. After a few second's close observation, he arose in disgust. "Damn!"

"Wrong game?" Marsha asked, unable to see the screen beyond Harry's body.

"No, it's the damned halftime entertainment. I wish the newsreels would stick to the *important* part of the sport, and skip those silly band formations." He glowered at the screen, on which white-garbed band members simultaneously played "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee" and imitated poorly a Mississippi steamboat, paddle wheel and all.

"I think it's rather clever," Marsha said. "Some people go to the game just to see those—"

She halted, as Harry impatiently tried to shush her in order to hear the announcer's voice, as his face appeared on the tube in place of the gambolling musicians. "Quiet, *quiet!*"

". . . for a rout of eighteen to thirteen," the man said, smiling in a Pepsodent way.

"In whose *favor*, damn it!?" Harry growled at the machine.

But the announcer was already narrating a sort of seaborne girly show from Coral Gables, where underclad bathing beauties did handstands and flips on skimming aquaplanes.



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"Phooey!" Harry muttered, and snapped off the set.

"Sorry, dear," said Marsha, contritely.

"Hell, it's not your fault," Harry said. He got back on the couch again, and tried to doze off. But sleep, though every nerve in his body cried for it, wouldn't come. There was something bothering him.

The only trouble was, he couldn't place the feeling of uncomfortable discontent in his mind. He lay awake a full hour, trying to pinpoint the source of his aggravation, before he finally collapsed into fitful slumber.

The next day, Monday, Harry was disappointed to find that Paul Carson was off duty. In his place, overseering the bored guardsmen, was a stringbean of a martinet, a green young second lieutenant named Robie Rawlins. He was about six feet tall, couldn't have weighed more than one hundred forty pounds, and had a gaunt face that looked like an irritated deathshead.

"Captain Coyne, sir!" he greeted Harry, snapping to full attention and throwing a forearm-quivering salute. Harry, in view of regulations, had to do the same back to him. Protocol accomplished, Harry sat down in the canvas chair, and tried to get oriented, though he knew there wouldn't be any change, or he'd have heard about it just by keeping his ears open on the subway ride downtown.

"Don't suppose our alien has shown his face again?"

"No, sir," said Rawlins, taking a sheaf of stapled papers from the table, and handing them to Harry. "I have here a full report of the night's activities."

Harry stared at the heavy manuscript, blinking. "What the hell did you write about, if nothing happened?"

Rawlins, going a bit pale at Harry's unmilitary manner, replied stiffly, "Changing of the guards, rifle inspection, and the report from the corporal of the guard. Which was, by the way, negative."

Harry had half a mind to snap at the man, then decided to simply forget it. In his own red-tapish way, Rawlins was merely trying to do his duty as he saw it. It took all kinds to make up an army. Harry sighed, and thanked Rawlins, promising to read the report later, though he had absolutely no intention of going near it again.

"Are you off duty now, Lieutenant?" he asked, hopefully.

". . . Officially, yes, but—



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Well, I'll stay on, if you like, sir. Give you someone to talk to . . ."

Harry hesitated, on the point of ordering Rawlins to go, then simply said, "Suit yourself." The day's outlook was pretty glum. He fished in his uniform for a cigarette, found one, and smoked it slowly, in silence.

After about five minutes, Rawlins spoke up.

"Sir—I was wondering . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, I'd think—under the circumstances, that part of our problem here would be to fend off curious civilians. I expected vast crowds of sensation-seekers down here at the park. But so far, there's been no one."

Harry grinned wryly. "People are strange creatures, Rawlins. If there were vague rumors, possible threats, that sort of thing, we'd have a city-wide panic on our hands. But this is different. Nothing in the least vague about it. The alien has given an unmistakeable ultimatum, one that is well nigh impossible to disbelieve. Therefore, people stay away so as to be able to not believe it."

Rawlins stared. "How's that again, sir?"

"It's a psychological paradox," Harry explained. "When there's a possible danger, people react in the form of panic. It's the not knowing that's so frightening. But when the danger is real, and positively guaranteed, a sort of calm settles over them. As in London, during World War II. The citizens, once they knew bomb threats were actual, once their homes and factories were really being systematically reduced to rubble, they got almost blasé about it. Went to work, out on dates, holidays by the seashore, as if nothing was wrong at all. Once you know you *can't* fight, you—well—you just *don't*."

"I don't see how they can simpy put it out of their minds—" Rawlins said, his face working nervously.

"It's not easy, but they do it. An attitude of let's-pretend-it's - not - there - and - maybe - it'll-go-away. Plus an incorrigible optimism, indigenous to Americans, that at the last minute Superman, the U. S. Cavalry, or Davy Crockett is going to make everything come out all right."

"What do you think we can do, sir?" Rawlins asked.

"I don't know about you," Harry said thoughtfully, "but I've already given serious thought to resigning my commission. If this is the end, I'd



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like to spend the last few days with my wife, instead of getting calluses on my behind down here."

Rawlins gave him a look of pure horror, as though Harry had heaved a rock at the statue of Liberty. "Resign—?" he croaked. "At a time like this?"

"I can't think of a better, offhand," Harry said. "And don't look so shocked. If there were something *wrong* with resigning a commission, rest assured the Army would forbid it."

"B-but—" Rawlins faltered.

"Oh, relax, Rawlins," Harry said irritably. "I haven't decided *yet!* I merely said I was thinking of it. I'm going to hang on awhile, till I've assured myself that defense against this alien is hopeless."

Rawlins, a little comforted, relaxed, as ordered. "A—a lot can happen in the remainder of our month's allotment," he said, slowly.

"Sure," said Harry, with no conviction. "Sure it can."

They sat there a few moments longer, then Rawlins, unable to think of anything else worth saying, suddenly got up. "Sir . . . I believe I'll go off duty after all."

Harry, much relieved, stood up, went through the saluting formalities, and regained his chair happily as the door closed behind the lieutenant.

He stared at the dull metal wall of the quonset, trying to think. Something was very definitely bugging him.

One month, he thought. One lousy month. The alien must *know* we can't evacuate the planet that quickly. Yet he gave us a month to do it in. *If* he knows our inability to comply with his demand— Then why the hell didn't he and the others simply come down and take over? Why this *avant-garde* spokesman? The more Harry thought about it, the less sense it made.

How about defenses? he went on in his mind. Fission was their most potent weapon, but also the trickiest to employ. So damned many unpleasant side-effects, what with fallout, radiation, area of blast— They'd use it only as a final resource, he felt.

Oh, there'd been suggestions aplenty, from all over the world. Military strategists through common civilians had sent all sorts of recommendations to the Pentagon, where nearly all were discarded. Some of them showed imagination, but were impractical for various reasons.

There was the housewife from Denver, who had written



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that if they waited till night, "when the monster is asleep" —Harry chuckled at her ingenious assumption of this as a fact—they could jack the vessels up, and slip the whole structure into the bay, whereupon the alien would drown when he attempted to come out.

A noted Russian scientist had suggested running high voltage through the structure, certain death to any creature with an Earth-type nervous system. Very little stood in the way of that suggestion, except that (1) they had no way of knowing if his system was Earth-type, (2) it would take more than a month to build a dynamo capable of generating an amount sufficient from death of one so huge, and (3) Doctor Freid had reported that the alloy was a non-conductor.

The best idea so far was from a Parisian chef, who asked why the individual vessels were not simply separated, giving the alien no chance to reassemble, or whatever it was he did. This had almost been tried, until it was found that the vessels stacked seamlessly, apparently linking molecules at points of contact, and resisting all efforts to budge them a fraction apart.

And, of course, none of the suggestions covered the really important detail: What was to be done when the *others* arrived? How *many* others were there? Even a few dozen would be beyond Earth's capacity for defense.

Harry sighed, and got up, deciding to take a stroll about the area. It wouldn't accomplish anything, but it'd stop him from fruitless brain-searching, which was beginning to give him a pounding headache.

The air outside was chilly, even for autumn, and Harry could see his breath spurting in small clouds before him as he started his disinterested tour of inspection.

He studiously avoided looking toward any of the semicircle of enlisted men as he made his roundabout promenade, thus avoiding the necessity of returning their salutes, if indeed any of them made any, with him a good twenty feet within their perimeter. He kept his eye on the cupric eyesore that glinted dully in the autumn sunlight in the Park, its lack of verdigris almost an open affront to the Statue of Liberty out in the bay.

Overhead, a scrambled squadron of gulls soared on



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motionless wings, seemingly about to crash head-on with one another, but always just missing such cranial disaster by a tilted feather or two. Wings had always fascinated Harry. He marveled at the design and function of feathers, which could work in unison or separately to give the wing itself the desired shape or form.

Harry was just watching the gulls and musing on this aerodynamic aspect of theirs, when a mind's-eye picture of the alien came back to him. With a small adrenalinic shock, he recalled the faceted eyes, the lumpy hair, corduroy outfit, and seemingly alligator boots. And then he thought of those band formations at the football game's half-time, with all the separate musicians functioning as a unit, a steamboat . . .

"Holy hell!" Harry cried. "I've got it!"

And that's when a small section of the coppery tower slid open, halfway to the summit, and a pulsing pink ray flipped out and snatched him bodily into the stack of alien vessels, almost as swiftly as a toad's tongue snaps up a passing grub.

"So," said Harry, as his eyes adjusted to the soft reddish lighting within the alien tower, "I was right. How many of you are there, anyhow?"

The answer came back instantly, filtering into his mind without bothering to use his ears as a medium of contact.

"One million, three hundred forty-two," said the voice in his mind.

Harry, floating weightlessly, ten stories from the bottom of the interior, shivered a little as he eyed the dancing, bobbing little spheres that were the aliens. Their reply left him feeling very much outnumbered. "Are you—are you *all* answering me at once?" he asked. "Or do you have an ambassador of sorts?"

"We all function as one, Harold Coyne. It is our way of life. It has been for many hundred generations."

"I wonder," said Harry, avoiding downward glances at the ghastly drop beneath his feet, "if you could set me down at ground-level? This no-gravity feeling is scaring the hell out of me."

"It is not necessary," said the voiceless voice, and the next instant, the wall of the cylinder behind him began to stretch, contort and extend, and Harry found himself seated on a metal replica of his armchair back home, one that



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even duplicated a small hole Harry'd inadvertently made with a cigarette, not a week before. "What is a ping-pong ball?"

Harry opened his mouth to reply, but the voice said, "Just *think* the answer, please. Your words slow down your thought processes."

Harry obligingly—if a little puzzledly—thought hard of a synthesis of all that was ping-pong-ballish. The size, weight, resilience, shape, and use flashed through his mind in an instant's concentration.

"Oh!" said the voice.

"Oh *what?*" Harry demanded, feeling frustrated.

"Oh, so that's what one is," the voice continued. "Some portion of your mind had made the observation that we each looked like a ping-pong ball. We merely ascertained that to which we had been compared."

"I see," said Harry, who didn't quite. "Well . . . uh . . . what do you want with me?"

"It's not that we want you in here," the imperturbable mental words continued. "It's just that we can no longer permit you to remain out there."

"Why not?" Harry asked.

"Because you have guessed our secret. Yes, you were perfectly right. There *is* no 'giant alien'. That was a composite of all of us, functioning as a unit, each assuming the proper spectrum tone to give the 'giant' his various shades of color. The voice that you heard, of course, was controlled use of the air molecules before the pseudo-mouth. We could have used telepathy, but that was too near our actual nature, so we preferred actual sonic waves. Made a rather nice echo, as we recall."

"Lovely," Harry agreed swiftly, hoping politeness might soften the brunt of any danger he might be in. "Is it true about the others, then? You lied—that is—you, uh, distorted the truth once; can I assume this was another—hmmm—ruse?"

"Truly you are sagacious, Harold Coyne. Yes, there are no more of us. We are the population, *in toto*, of an Earth-type planet that was formerly revolving about Vega."

"Formerly?" said Harry.

"It is gone," said the voice.

"Aw—aw shucks!" said Harry, as sympathetically as he could manage. "What a lousy break."

An image formed in his mind of a sort of splintered surface, alive with maggots. "Lousy break?" said the voice.

"Uh . . . unfortunate oc-



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currence," said Harry, quickly.

"Oh!" said the voice. "An idiom. They trouble us."

"Well, then maybe I better steer clear of them," said Harry. "—*avoid using* them!" he added, before the question could come at him. "But look," he went on. "If you people can control air molecules the way you did with the giant's voice, and metallic molecules, like when you jerrybuilt me this armchair—And if you're each tinier than a grapefruit—Why have us clear off the planet?"

"Oh, we have no intention of actually having the Earthpeople depart. That was merely a defensive strategem."

"Then what the hell—?" Harry choked.

"Shall we tell you a story?" asked the voice.

Harry groaned. "Why not?" he muttered. "Shoot— That is, go ahead . . . I mean: Tell it."

Well (said the voice in his mind), the Orbics—that's us—used to have limbs for locomotion, organs for observing light, and sound, and all the other appurtenances that you people have. We didn't *look* much like you, of course, but functionally, we were on a par with Earthmen. But we slowly came to realize that Intellect was the most important part of existence, and, as our minds developed more and more—we had to work at it, but develop they did—and gained more and more control over the physical world, our bodies grew less and less utilitarian. And so we gradually—Oh, you know, Harold Coyne! It's an ancient theme in your science-fiction stories on Earth. Anyhow, to make a long evolution short— We became almost all mind, and hardly any body. But we were forced to retain a few physical properties, such as a need for oxygen atmosphere, because we couldn't keep our brains alive without the stuff. It was a nuisance, but there it was. Well, with the loss of our bodies, we also lost out on reproduction— But everything has a price, we guess . . . Though it did eliminate domestic squabbles—

Where were we?

Oh, yes— Anyhow, our population, while no longer subject to the ravages of old age, had to take precautions to remain even static. Some unit was forever getting struck by lightning, or gobbled up by a skrantch—

(Harry had a briefly sickening vision of a sort of fanged boulder, with an insatiable ap-



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petite and a hopeless lack of table manners.)

—and our population started dwindling badly. In desperation, we united, linked minds across the planetary surface to act as a single thinking being, gave storm warnings, skrantch bulletins, and—anyhow, after that, we stayed at our present number, one million, three hundred forty-two. But that's when the comet came.

"What comet?" asked Harry, enthralled by the tale.

The one that destroyed *our* planet. We don't have a word for it, really. We called it "Earth", too, in our language. Oh well. Anyhow—we spotted it a few million miles out, and knew we'd have to evacuate. It was sad, but necessary. So we made the ships, twenty-five of them, and—

"How come twenty-five?" Harry asked.

Comfort plus economy of materials plus performance. It gave us roughly forty thousand per ship, which was just about right for running the ship, plus having enough air on board to survive the journey here.

"How come no oxygen tanks?"

We don't breathe that often. Maybe once a week, by your calendar. But when we need it, we need it fast, or we snuff out. So we came here to settle. And— Well, that's about it, Harold Coyne.

The voice ceased its story, and a heavy mental silence fell in Harry's brain. He sat there, hoping for more, but nothing else came.

"I don't get it," he said, finally. "Then why all the messing around with a fake giant, and an ultimatum to get out, and— Say, are you really atomic-proof?"

"Which question shall we answer first?"

"Either one."

"Very well. The second first. No, not really. That was another ruse."

"If you're such hot stuff, how come all these ruses?"

"To be blunt: We're afraid of Earthmen. We had to do something. The next nearest planet with the proper atmosphere is so far that even oxygen tanks might give out en route. So, like it or not, we had to come here."

"But what are you scared of?" Harry said, doggedly.

"You have people—of your own race, mind you—who have difficulties living here, do you not? Just because of superficial differences? Silly things like skin color, point of geographic origin, and lan-



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guage? Well, then, how about *us*? If *unimportant* differences cause Earthmen to hate and make war on others, what are *our* chances for survival? Do you see?"

"Oh. Oh, yeah. I do," said Harry, slightly ashamed of his species. "I—"

He stopped himself abruptly, just short of voicing the thought, but it had already entered his head, and therefore their heads, too.

"You wonder why we do not simply use our powers to obliterate you," said the voice. Harry winced, hoping he hadn't given them ideas. "Don't be afraid. We can't. You see, destruction is unintelligent, and we, being nearly pure intellect—" It left the thought unfinished. Harry got the point.

"So— So why the giant, then?" he asked.

"Well, it's this way, Harold Coyne. Though we function as one mental being, we are fond, individually, of our parts. Should we have made the attempt to merely go zooming out of our ships on reaching Earth's atmosphere, we feared that a stray rocket or so would have destroyed some of us. We are, you recall, irreplaceable, once we're destroyed. So, sensing that the men outside were not hostile, merely wary, we decided to blend into a recognizable shape—if a bit large—to ease some of the tension at our appearance. Your soldiers would be less likely to open fire on a man-shape than upon something which looked like a group of ping-pong balls."

"That's true," Harry said. "But why one *big* man? Why not a lot of normal-sized ones?"

The voice, in his mind, went tsk-tsk. "You are already forgetting that which led you to guess our deception: Our nubbly appearance. Rough complexion, 'alligator' boots, and so on. That was because we cannot contract our already absolute minimum bodies. In a single large size, the lumpy surface appearance was not so noticeable as in a group of single men. Even with our intellect, we cannot make a recognizably human face out of objects the size of ping-pong balls."

"Neither could I," Harry offered, sensing their slight feeling of inadequacy. "But —" he pursued, "what was your long-range plan? You'd have to come out at the end of the month, wouldn't you?"

"Well, actually, we'd planned on *sneaking* out, when no one was watching. It was—to



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use an Earth idiom—a lousy scheme, at best. What with the sunlight by day, the searchlights at night, and soldiers everywhere, we couldn't have sneaked out a—a—"

"A pinhead?" Harry suggested.

"Thank you. —a pinhead, let alone something *our* size. So here we are. We seem to be stuck."

"Maybe," said Harry, trying to be offhand about it, "Maybe *I* can help you."

"You?" scoffed the voice. "Why, your mind tells us that you're a relative *nobody* on Earth, Harold Coyne."

"Oh, yeah?" said Harry. "Then you don't know Earth-people very well. How long have I been in here?"

"About an hour . . ."

"Ha!" said Harry. "Then by now, the entire planet knows that I've been snatched by the alien giant! My plight is being discussed in every medium of communication on the Earth! Why, my picture will probably—" his face took on an almost holy light of anticipation "—will probably be on the cover of *Life* Magazine!"

"We still are without comprehension, Harold Coyne."

"Oh. Well, let me explain. The idea is, with the whole world anxiously awaiting news of me that when I emerge—you *will* let me emerge, won't you?"

"If it is compatible with our safety, of course."

"Oh, it is. Very much so. In fact, it's necessary to your safety."

"Kindly elucidate."

"Well, when I emerge, what with all the worry and the anxiety outside, all at once I'll be mobbed by reporters, all anxious for my first statement after being held captive by an alien. The whole world will hear whatever I say at that moment."

"While this is incomprehensible to us, we see in your mind that it is the truth as you know it, and extremely likely that it is the truth as it is . . . Ah, yes! It *is* as you say. We detect a strong pulsing of eager, violent minds—What is a deadline?"

"Reporters, huh? Oh, a deadline is the time beyond which it is useless to turn in an article for a certain issuing of the paper— Damn! You've got me talking like *you* guys, now!"

"Very well, Harold Coyne. We detect your honesty in dealing with us. We find that the world is indeed awaiting word of you. What we do not



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know is what you plan to say, when we permit you to emerge."

"Well, first of all, I'd like to have the President of the United States out there."

"Why?"

"I always wanted to meet him, for one thing. But also, he's in a good position to make a statement to the world that will carry some weight. My popularity is a nine-days' wonder. But he's got some time left in office yet. People will listen to him."

There was a pause, as the composite mind surrounding him digested this information. Then, "Why can we not detect your full plan, Harold Coyne? By the set of your mind, we know you *have* a plan, something that reflects mutual benefit for Earthmen and Orbics— But what it is we cannot see."

"That's because I haven't formulated it, yet," Harry said. "Just as a man, about to go out onto a deserted night street in a tough area of a city has only the feeling of apprehension in his mind. If he pauses and thinks, he finds a succession of thoughts of tall dark strangers with a variety of weapons, and so on. But he has only the *general* worry, to begin with."

"Hmmm . . ." said the mind, the first non-positive thought Harry had received.. "All we detect is that you wish to use our powers in conjunction with your world's physical endowments in order to make some sort of political coup. Could you elucidate?"

"Soon's I see the President," said Harry, deliberately keeping his mind from enlarging on his scheme. "He'll have to be here, because he can give orders. I can only make suggestions."

The inner voice seemed to give a kind of neural sigh. "Very well, Harold Coyne. We shall arrange it."

Three hours later, the President was standing outside the alien structure, brought there by jet after receiving an anonymous order out of empty air before his desk that his presence was necessary to the solution of the problem of the alien on American shores. He looked, as Harry watched him through the relayed awareness of the aliens, a little bit shaky, even though surrounded by a cordon of grim-faced Secret Service guards, with drawn pistols.

"Shall we bring him in, or will you go out?" asked the voice.

"Whatever's easiest," said Harry, reclining comfortably



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in his coppery armchair, ten stories above the base of the stacked vessels.

A second later, he heard the shouts outside the opening which had appeared in the wall before him, and watched with fascination as a pink ray lifted the President of the United States inside, to bob helplessly in midair as the gap sealed itself behind him.

"Here, now," said Harry. "That's no way to treat our top executive. Give him a chair, for pete's sake!"

Soundlessly, another cupric extrusion blossomed beside Harry on the wall, and the President was lofted gently into place upon it.

"Hello, sir," Harry said respectfully. "Captain Harold Coyne is who I am."

"A pleasure," said the President, recovering his dignity quickly. "Are we prisoners?"

"No, sir. I just needed your help, that's all."

"I see," said the President, able to grasp at least that much. "But where's the giant?"

"All over us," Harry said, and proceeded to explain the facts of the situation. When he finished, the President looked positively elated.

"Fine work, Captain!" he exclaimed. "You should have been a diplomat. Touchy business, dealing with aliens. But you've handled things admirably. Now, tell me, what's this plan of yours?"

"Well, the way I see it, sir, we and the aliens have one thing in common: we want peace, right?"

"True. Quite so," said the President.

"However, the aliens' worry is a more direct one; they dread having people take potshots at them. They *do* look a bit too much like those glass balls that dance on water jets in shooting galleries. Our worry, of course, is that mankind will get all riled up some day soon, and destroy itself."

"Pity 'tis, 'tis true," said the President, who had once played a pretty good Polonius back in high school.

"So I've figured out a combination, see," Harry went on, eagerly, "whereby we exchange them a bit of information for a bit of work."

"Sounds — uh — reasonable, I guess." The President paused, then, "What information did you have in mind?"

"Why, the formula for steel, of course," said Harry. "These aliens have intelligence, but alloys depend on luck and discovery. That's why they use these poor coppery vessels, sir. No one ever



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figured out how to make steel. And iron, of course, wears out and rusts."

"Mmmmph," said the President, digesting this. "Uh—Why do we give them the—I mean, what use can they possibly—?"

"Jackets," said Harry, as though it were obvious. "If each of them wears a protective steel jacket, a potshot can't injure them at all, see?"

"But why not?" the President argued. "Certain bullets can penetrate steel . . ."

"Not when it's floating in midair. All a bullet could do would be to knock it out of line-of-flight for a moment. And the very shape of a sphere tends to make it resilient, and nearly impossible to shatter."

"Excuse us, Harold Coyne, but aren't you forgetting that we Orbics function as a unit? If we desired individual coverings, we'd have come in one million, three hundred forty-two separate globes."

"That's just your trouble, tired thinking," said Harry. "You're not circling Vega now, you're on Earth, and in America, where the rights of the Individual are paramount!"

He shut his eyes and thought hard, patriotically, letting his thoughts flip from the Spirit of '76 up to the election of 1964.

"We begin to comprehend," said the voice. "Yes, we *have* thought more of the group than the individual. We shall change our thinking at once."

"Good," said Harry. "Then it's all settled."

"Wait!" said the President. "We give them the formula, fine. What do we get back?"

"World peace," Harry said. "As soon as each is coated protectively in steel—and don't forget to leave airholes for breathing, you guys—they take off and spread about the planet, all of them. They link to one another mentally, and become our new International Police Force. You see, sir, they read minds. In this way, no one can possibly commit even a tiny little old misdemeanor undetected, let alone perpetrate a *war*!"

"Excuse us again," said the voice, "but what rule could we apply in order to know what was right or wrong? Our sense of morality may differ from yours, and we wouldn't want to infringe . . ."

"Oh, that should be easy enough," said Harry. "After all, the simplest solutions are the best . . . How about just leaving it at this: Don't let anybody get away with any-



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thing that will impinge on the rights of anybody else? It's more or less a paraphrase of the Golden Rule, but it should cover the situation."

"That seems reasonable," said the voice. "Allow us a moment to confer."

In the silence that ensued, Harry turned to the President. "What do you think, sir?"

"Fine. Fine plan. Splendid solution. I am in favor of it. Nothing like a peaceful world."

"Not so far, anyhow," said Harry.

The aliens made contact again.

"We are agreeable. Consider it done. Now, when do we learn the formula for steel?"

"Any time you want," said Harry. "Just tune in on the mind of any physics teacher at New York University. It's just slightly northwest of where we are now. The formula is not a secret one. They should each of them know it."

A long pause ensued, while they dredged the scientific minds at the university. They made contact once more, after a minute.

"It is all in readiness, Harold Coyne. Already, from a large mill in Pennsylvania, steel is flying here by mental energy, to make us our new jackets."

"You *stole* it?" the President gasped.

"We left something called an I.O.U. Harold Coyne's mind is convinced that this is next best to legal tender."

"Oh well, what's a little steel!" sighed the President. "Come on, Captain Coyne, let's get out of this place."

"May we?" Harry asked the aliens.

"Yes, now that all is settled. Rest assured we will keep our end of the bargain to the letter."

Harry felt a warm glow of accomplishment as he and the President were suddenly floated out the open side of the structure on that pink ray, and gently deposited on the grass before a cluster of soldiers, reporters, and mobile TV units.

"Friends—" said the President, "I have an announcement to make . . ."

Marsha, who had fainted when first she heard on the TV that her husband had been snatched up by the 'alien giant', was pretty well self-controlled, thanks to the kind assistance of a neighbor with a bowl of hot chicken broth, when the next announcement came over the set. She'd sat



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there for four hours, waiting news of her Harry.

And then it came.

Marsha sat bolt upright on the sofa, staring at the screen. There was Harry, and beside him was the President! And he had his arm across Harry's shoulders!

A thrill of pride started Marsha's heart beating wildly in her breast. My man! she cried within herself. Proudly, she listened to the President's speech.

". . . greatest day in the world's history. We all owe a vote of thanks to Harry Coyne, captain in the New York National Guard, whose ingenious thinking has set the world upon its legs at last, freed forever from fear of war, or even minor crimes . . ."

An uncomfortable knot began to tie itself in Marsha's aorta as she listened. Her Harry, making a decision that influenced the world? Heaven help the world!

". . . as he said to me inside that alien vessel—'. . . after all, the simplest solutions are the best . . .' "

Marsha stiffened. As of its own volition, her head turned about. She looked toward the kitchen door, then toward the cookbook . . ."Oh, no," she breathed. "Not one of *Harry's* solutions! Not that! Good *grief*, not *that*!"

It was too much to be borne. Marsha fainted again.

Things took a few days to get started. The aliens, who were a naturally neat race, generously took upon themselves the task of removing the stack of spaceships from Battery Park, and storing them in a special wing of the Smithsonian Institution for posterity to enjoy. Although posterity, thanks to the new steel jackets, would undoubtedly be enjoying the aliens themselves. Only then did they start work on the ingots of steel they'd left piled in the park while they cleaned up their mess.

And a small argument broke out then, with the individual aliens debating whether it were better to make all identical jackets, as "police uniforms," or dissimilar ones, as befitted their importance as individuals. They finally decided on similar shapes, but different colors, ending up looking—before they all took off for their 'round-the-world duty stations—like nothing so much as an explosion in a billiard ball factory. Every color, every stripe, polka dot, geometric design possible was employed



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on the individual Orbics. For a change, Paramount News even made up a special reel in Technicolor, of the takeoff flight. There was a band playing, and a cheering crowd, and flags, and—oh, all the fixings for a swell send-off.

The mayor's wife, a little confused, had shown up with a bottle of champagne, as had the President's lady, and both got into a lively discussion about who had the better right to launch whatever it was that was to be launched. The aliens finally solved the dilemma—since there was nothing but an individual alien that they could strike at with their magnums—by having the two ladies stand two paces apart, and swing the two bottles together in a glorious crash of glass, foam, and golden wine.

It was photographed by all photographers present, and each tried to submit it for Picture of the Year. However, this award was won by a small boy with a brownie camera, who happened to photograph the First Lady while two aliens bobbed before her face, just on either side of the bridge of her nose. His title: "First Lady with BEM Blood?", was appreciated only by science-fiction fans, all of whom were claiming also that they'd known the aliens were friendly all along.

The ceremony passed. The crowds departed. Everybody went home tired but happy, as the aliens skimmed to their relative satellite positions above the earth, at a height of about half a mile. (They'd given their word to keep out of the way of airliners and such, of course.)

Peace had come at last, people felt.

They felt this way for about one hour after the launching ceremony . . .

Harry and Marsha were on the sofa, smooching, as even old married couples will. Marsha had finally put aside her trepidations about Harry's interference with the world. It could be, she convinced herself, that for once one of his ideas doesn't have side-effects worse than the original problem. After all, he *had* taped the cookbook page in place again, and he *had* brought the kitchen door back when she'd complained— Perhaps Harry had finally wised up and suggested the right action.

Breaking laughingly from a gruffly amorous clinch, Marsha jumped up from Harry's lap and started for the kitchen. "If we're going to carry on this way," she called back over



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her shoulder, "I'm going to need sustenance."

"Aw, c'mere!" Harry said, too comfortable to chase her.

"In a minute," she said. "First, I have a date with a cold chicken leg."

Harry shrugged, and settled deeper into the sofa cushions. Then he found himself leaping, startled, to his feet, as a booming voice came from the kitchen.

"HALT!" the crashing sound said.

Harry heard a clattering crunch, as the chicken platter dropped from Marsha's hands. He dashed out to find her cowering against the kitchen wall, staring wildly into the empty space over the kitchen table.

"H-Harry," she gasped. "A voice! Right out of the air!"

"It must be one of the aliens," he said, bewildered. "Uh—" Harry felt silly addressing the air, but there seemed nothing else to do. "Uh—what's up?"

"Your wife was about to partake of that cold fowl's left leg," said the voice. "In her mind, she was fully aware of the fact that she had already, yesterday, partaken of that same fowl's right leg."

"S-so what?" said Harry, when the voice stayed silent for a few moments.

"As man and wife, each of you has a right to half the chicken. If your wife has both legs, it is an infringement on your rights."

Harry gawked at the air before his face. "But I don't *like* the legs!" he protested. "I take the wings, instead."

"That is unequal distribution," said the voice.

"All right, all right," said Harry. "I *relinquish* my right! Will that satisfy you?"

"No," said the voice. "I am sworn to uphold your rights. You do not know what is best for you, apparently."

"*What!?!*" Harry squawked. "But that's silly! What would you do if Marsha made chicken *soup* out of the bird? How'd you know whether we were getting our equal share of leg- or wing-broth, eh?"

"I would know," said the voice. Harry had a sinking feeling that it *would*, too.

"But—" he pleaded.

"Harold Coyne, either you eat the chicken leg, or no one shall. I shall utilize mental energy to build a force barrier about it, through which none but your teeth can pass."

"You're nuts!" Harry roared. "A force-barrier around a *chicken leg*?"

"I am only doing my duty as I see it," said the voice. Abruptly, the sense of *presence*



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was gone, and Harry knew that he and Marsha were alone again. He turned to her. She was staring at him with narrowed eyes, a funny set to her mouth.

". . . Mar?" he said, after a nervous moment.

"I might have known, Harry Coyne," she whispered, her aspirates harsh with frustrated rage. "I could have even *predicted* this sorry mess!" Her voice slowly grew louder, as she warmed to her topic. "And *we* only have a *chicken!* We're a *lucky* family, by comparison. Can you imagine some poor housewife trying to get perfectly equal distribution of *pork chops?* And what about the short-order cooks in restaurants, going crazy trying to measure pancake batter to the *drop!*"

Harry, his face white and perspiring, tried to think of a rebuttal, and couldn't. "Aw . . . Aw, Mar—" he muttered.

"Don't aw-Mar *me!*" she shrieked. "Get your damned barrier-proof teeth over there and eat that precious chicken leg!"

"But I *hate* the leg!" Harry cried, piteously.

"You're eating that leg if I have to force-feed you!" she said, snatching up the cold drumstick and advancing upon his quivering hulk in the corner, like Lady Macbeth nearing the bedside of the king.

"HALT!" came a voice.

Marsha let the drumstick fall to the linoleum, and sprang with a screaming whimper into Harry's arms. "It's him again!" she gasped, wide-eyed and trembling.

"Marsha Coyne, you are infringing on the right of your husband to refuse sustenance until such time as he deems it necessary!" the voice declared loudly.

Marsha shook her head, confused. "But you just said—"

"Hold it, Mar," said Harry, whose sojourn with the aliens in the tower had given him slightly greater awareness of their minor differences. "Ye gods, I believe this is another one!"

"Of course!" the voice said, snappishly. "How can we possibly patrol the planet unless we keep in motion at all times? The officer you refer to has already passed out of this district—we've divided Earth into one million three hundred forty-two precincts, you know—"

"I *didn't* know—" Harry murmured, but the voice went on.

"So this is my district for the next ten minutes. The way I see it, if he doesn't want the



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chicken leg, you have no right to force it upon him."

There was a sudden hollow feeling in their heads, and the alien voice was gone.

Marsha, the terror past, made no move to leave her tightly snuggled position within Harry's arms.

"This is even worse," she said, her voice flat and toneless with the beginnings of horror. "If each of the aliens interprets the law in his own way— There'll be chaos!"

"I guess—I guess we *should* have another conference, maybe, Harry agreed slowly. "To clear up this little misunderstanding."

The phone jangled harshly, almost as if the operator had somehow been able to turn up its volume. Harry stepped into the living room and snatched it up. "Hello?"

"Captain Coyne?" came an anguished voice. "This is the President!"

"Oh, how are you sir!" Harry said smartly.

"*Miserable,* you dunderhead!" screamed the chief executive. "I can't take a bath! Did you hear me? I, the President, have been *ousted* from the White House john!"

"B-b-b-but *why,* sir?" Harry squeaked.

"Because if I take a hot bath, there won't be enough water left in the heater for my *wife!* That's why!"

The President sounded near to tears. "I've had a long day at the office, and I'm *rancid* with sweat, but this voice in midair *roared* at me, when I tried turning on the faucet!"

"Uh . . ." said Harry.

"So I said, 'Don't be silly. My wife doesn't need a bath', and the voice said, 'The *hell* she doesn't!' "

"Uh . . ." said Harry.

"Damn it to perdition, Captain," the President said, weeping openly at last, "I had to have one of the White House staff place this stupid *phone call* for me!"

"Place the *call—?*" Harry gargled. "But why, sir?"

"Because I've overshot my *allotment,* you jerk! These bobbing numbskulls have decided that no one can make any more phone calls than anyone else. According to them, I can't make any more phone calls until September of 1989!"

"You—you could write letters . . ." Harry ventured.

"*Arghhh!*" said the President. "Listen, you got us into this, and it's up to you to get us *out!* Now you better do some thinking, and some damned *fine* thinking, *fast,* before I send a stratojet over



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your home with a payload of H-bombs!"

"Excuse me," said a strange voice on the line, "but such an action would interfere with Coyne's right to live out his allotted span of years, which may—"

"Oh, no!" the President screamed. "No, no, no, no, no . . ."

". . . Sir?" Harry said, after a pause.

Nothing came to his ears but muffled sobs. Feeling a bit wrung out he gently replaced the receiver.

"You heard?" he said to Marsha.

"He was shouting quite loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear," she remarked. "Well, Harry? What can we do?"

He stared at her, then smiled. "You said 'we' . . ." he said softly, cautiously, hopefully . . .

Marsha came into his arms and laid her head against his chest. "You're a boob, Harry Coyne," she sighed, "but you are all I've got."

"I beg to differ," came a voice from the room's center. "Having investigated the marital status of individuals in this precinct, I find that it contains more unmarried men than women. This deficiency has been taken care of, and your three other husbands are even now on their way here, to share in your happily married life."

"Harry!" Marsha cried. "He doesn't mean it?"

The doorbell rang, loudly.

"Oh, yes, he does," Harry said, rushing to the door and putting on the sturdy iron night-bolt. "Stay out of here, you lechers!" he shouted. "She is mine, all mine!"

"We can't!" male voices yelled back. "We're being forced! Something's dragging at our neckties!"

Almost before Harry spotted it, the night-bolt started to slide back. "Oh, no, you don't!" he snarled, grappling with the small metal knob and slamming the bolt home again.

"Harold Coyne, you are interfering with these men's right to have a mate!" boomed the alien voice.

"They are interfering with *my* right to have some privacy!" Harry hollered back, fighting the bolt with all his strength.

"Marriage is more important than privacy," said the voice. The bolt started shooting open.

"A man's home is his castle!" Harry cried in desperation, slamming the thing home again.



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"Mercy, mercy!" pleaded the men outside. "We're choking to death!" Harry could hear the strangulated tones due to the pull on their neckties.

"No," he said hoarsely, straining to fight the bolt's egress from the slot, a losing battle as the alien concentrated. "You can't come in. She's *my* wife, damn it!"

Marsha helpfully put her tiny hands upon his own and helped him hold the bolt in place. "Go away!" she trilled.

"We'd *love* to!" came the chorus. "But how?"

"Look," Harry said toward the alien voice's locale, "why not just forget the whole bargain and go away? We don't *want* you to police the world anymore. You're wrecking our lives!"

"We would, Harry Coyne," said the implacable alien, "but to obey such a suggestion would infringe on *our* rights as policemen."

"Oh, no, no, no!" Harry wept helplessly. "This is a nightmare!"

"If you'll excuse me," said the alien," I'm due in the next precinct, now." The *presence* vanished, and the bolt lay lifeless in its slot once more.

"What happened?" said one of the men outside.

"New cop on duty," said Harry. "You guys better scram while you have the chance."

That they took his suggestion quickly was evinced by the sudden thundering of feet in the outside hall, then on the stairs, then gone through the front door.

"Whew," Harry mopped numbly at his forehead. "We have got to get rid of them. I can't take much more, honey."

"Harry," said Marsha, suddenly. "I've got an idea!"

"What idea?" Harry asked.

"I know how to get rid of them!" she said. "It's got to work. It's our only chance."

"Tell me, quick!" Harry demanded.

"Well, that's the trouble. I don't have the main point, just the main idea. All we have to do to get rid of them is to get them to fight amongst themselves, see? Let them pick each other off."

"And you need . . . ?" Harry said, eagerly.

"A subject for them to fight about," said Marsha.

Harry snapped his fingers. *"Got it!"* he cried. *"Quick,* honey, do we have any liquor left from our last party?"

"I think so," said Marsha, following her husband into the kitchen. She watched, bewildered, as he fumbled in the



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wall cupboard for a couple of bottles. When he turned to face her, his eyes were dancing.

"*Officer!*" he bellowed.

They felt the *presence* instantly. "Yes?"

"Isn't it a police officer's duty to be helpful to people, when he's not preventing crime?" Harry asked.

"Certainly," said the voice.

"Well, my wife and I have decided to celebrate the coming of peace to the world at last, but we have a problem."

"State it," said the voice.

"It's a world-wide problem, I should warn you," Harry said. "Earthmen have debated it for years. You may need help from your fellow officers . . ."

"We are always linked," it responded. "Kindly state your dilemma, and it shall be resolved in short order."

"Oh, thank you," said Harry. "It's really very simple: What proportions of gin and vermouth make the ideal martini?"

"Excuse me, while I consult," said the voice.

The *presence* vanished. It was the last recorded instance of any personal contact between Orbic and Earthman.

There *was*, however, a ghastly hour of *impersonal* contact, as the members of the International Police Force, all culling their information from the various minds on the planet, met high over the Atlantic to have it out.

Historians say you could see the sparks for twenty miles as those painted spheres met in furious conflict, steel clashing against steel, until finally all of them met in one titanic clash that echoed from Liverpool to Long Island.

The mentally-heard cries of "4-to-1!" "9-to-2!" "7-to-3!" and so on, that gave the entire Earth population a headache, all ceased simultaneously, as the battered spheres, with their stunned occupants, plunged into the ocean. No one felt quite safe again for a week, the Orbic's air-breathing limit.

And then the peaceful feeling of world hostility came back, with its dangerous, but nostalgic, international emotion. Harry Coyne made a fortune with a new pre-mixed cocktail he's bottled and put on the market. He calls it the Doomsday Army Martini.

It's exactly one million, three hundred forty-two to one.

**THE END**



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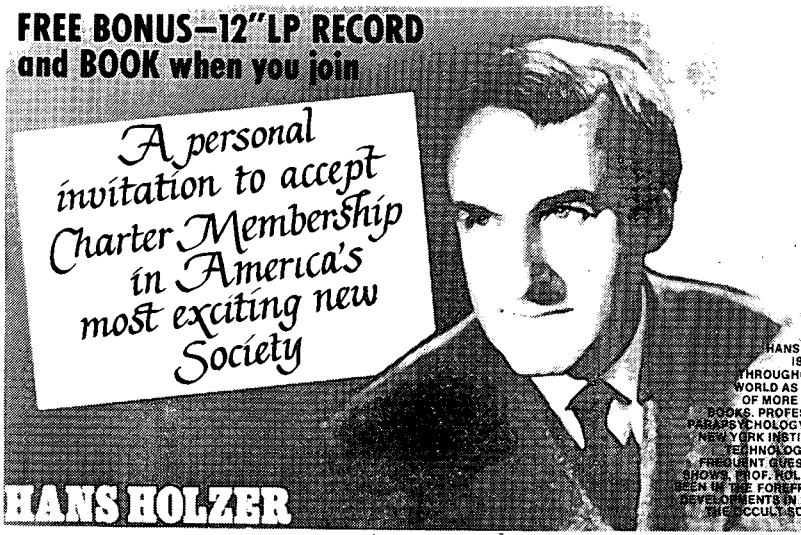

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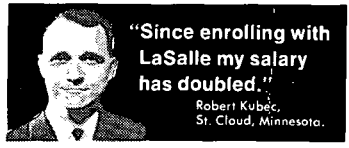


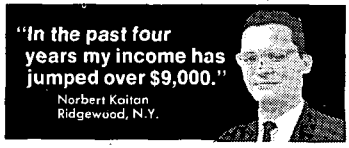


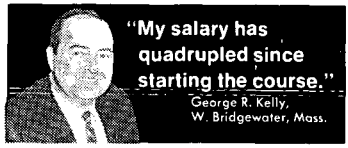


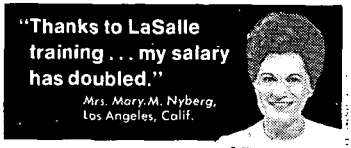


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